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THE

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CONTAINING THE FOURTH VOLUME OF

STERNE'S WORKS.

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THE

WORKS

OF

LAURENCE STERNE,

IN SIX VOLUMES;

CONTAINING

THE LIFE AND OPINIONS OF TRISTRAM SHANDY, GENT.....A SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY THROUGH FRANCE AND ITALY....., SERMONS.....LETTERS, &c.

WITH

A LIFE OF THE AUTHOR,

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.

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SERMONS

BY

LAURENCE STERNE.

SERMON I.

INQUIRY AFTER HAPPINESS.

PSALM IV. 6.

There be many that say, who will shew us any good ?—Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.

The great pursuit of man is after happiness ; it is the first and strongest desire of his nature ;—in every stage of his life he searches for it as for hid treasures ;—courts it under a thousand different shapes, —and, though perpetually disappointed,—still persists,—runs after, and enquires for it afresh,—asks every passenger who comes in his way, *Who will shew him any good ?*—who will assist him in the attainment of it, or direct him to the discovery of this great end of all his wishes ?

He is told by one, to search for it among the more gay and useful pleasures of life, in scenes of mirth and sprightliness, where happiness ever presides, and is ever to be known by the joy and laughter which he will at once see painted in her looks.

A second, with a graver aspect, points out to the costly dwellings which pride and extravagance have erected :—tells the enquirer, that the object he is in search of inhabits there ;—that happiness lives only in company with the great, in the midst of much pomp and outward state ;—that he will easily find her out by the coat of many colours she has on, and the great luxury and expense of equipage and furniture with which she always sits surrounded.

The miser blesses God ;—wonders how any one would mislead, and wilfully put him upon so wrong a scent,—convinces him that happiness and extravagance never inhabited under the same roof ;—that, if he would not be disappointed in his search, he must look into the plain and thrifty dwelling of the prudent man, who knows and understands the worth of money, and cautiously lays it up against an evil hour : that it is not the prostitution of wealth upon the passions, or the parting with it all, that constitutes happiness ;—but that it is the keeping it together, and the *having* and *holding* it fast to him and his heirs forever, which are the chief attributes that form this great idol of human worship, to which so much incense is offered up every day.

The epicure, though he easily rectifies so gross a mistake, yet, at the same time, he plunges him, if possible, into a greater ; for, hearing the object of his pursuit to be happiness, and knowing of no other happiness than what is seated immediately in his senses,—he sends the enquirer there, tells him 'tis in vain to search elsewhere for it than where nature herself has placed it,—in the indulgence and gratification of the appetites, which are given us for that end : and, in a word,—if he will not take his opinion in the matter,—he may trust the word of a much wiser man, who has assured us, That there is nothing better in this world, than that a man should eat and drink, and rejoice in his works, and make his soul enjoy good in his labour ;—for that is his portion.

To rescue him from this brutal experiment, ambition takes him by the hand, and carries him into the world,—shews him all the kingdoms of the

earth and the glory of them,—points out the many ways of advancing his fortune, and raising himself to honour ;—lays before his eyes all the charms and bewitching temptations of power, and asks if there can be any happiness in this world like that of being caressed, courted, flattered, and followed ?

To close all,—the philosopher meets him bustling in the full career of this pursuit,—stops him,—tells him, if he is in search of happiness, he is far gone out of his way :—that this deity has long been banished from noise and tumults, where there was no rest found for her, and was fled into solitude far from all commerce of the world ; and, in a word, if he would find her, he must leave this busy and intriguing scene, and go back to that peaceful scene of retirement and books, from which he at first set out.

In this circle too often does man run, tries all experiments, and generally sits down weary and dissatisfied with them all at last,—in utter despair of ever accomplishing what he wants,—nor knowing what to trust to after so many disappointments,—or where to lay the fault, whether in the incapacity of his own nature, or the insufficiency of the enjoyments themselves.

In this uncertain and perplex'd state,—without knowledge which way to turn or where to betake ourselves for refuge,—so often abused and deceived by the many who pretend thus to shew us any good, —Lord ! says the Psalmist, lift up the light of thy countenance upon us ! Send us some rays of thy grace and heavenly wisdom, in this benighted search after happiness, to direct us safely to it ! O God ! let us not wander forever without a guide, in this

dark region, in endless pursuit of our mistaken good, but enlighten our eyes that we sleep not in death ;—open to them the comforts of thy holy word and religion ;—lift up the light of thy countenance upon us,—and make us know the joy and satisfaction of living in the true faith and fear of thee, which only can carry us to this haven of rest where we would be,—that sure haven, where true joys are to be found, which will at length not only answer all our expectations,—but satisfy the most unbounded of our wishes forever and ever.

The words thus opened, naturally reduce the remaining part of the discourse under two heads.—The first part of the verse,—" There be many that " say, Who will shew us any good ?"—To make some reflections upon the insufficiency of most of our enjoyments towards the attainment of happiness, upon some of the most received plans on which 'tis generally sought.

The examination of which will lead us up to the source and true secret of all happiness, suggested to us in the latter part of the verse :—" Lord ! lift " thou up the light of thy countenance upon us,"—that there can be no real happiness without religion and virtue, and the assistance of God's grace and Holy Spirit to direct our lives in the true pursuit of it.

Let us enquire into the disappointments of human happiness, on some of the most received plans on which 'tis generally sought for and expected by the bulk of mankind.

There is hardly any subject more exhausted, or which, at one time or other, has afforded more matter for argument and declamation than this one, of

the insufficiency of our enjoyments. Scarce a reformed sensualist, from Solomon down to our own days, who has not in some fits of repentance or disappointment uttered some sharp reflection upon the emptiness of human pleasure, and of the vanity of vanities which discovers itself in all the pursuits of mortal man.—But the mischief has been, that, though so many good things have been said, they have generally had the fate to be considered either as the overflowings of disgust from sated appetites, which could no longer relish the pleasures of life; or, as the declamatory opinions of recluse and splenetick men, who had never tasted them at all, and, consequently, were thought no judges of the matter. So that 'tis no great wonder, if the greatest part of such reflections, however just in themselves and founded on truth and a knowledge of the world, are found to leave little impression where the imagination was already heated with great expectations of future happiness; and that the best lectures that have been read upon the vanity of the world, so seldom stop a man in the pursuit of the object of his desire, or give him half the conviction that the possession of it will, and what the experience of his own life, or a careful observation upon the life of others, do at length generally confirm to us all.

Let us endeavour then to try the cause upon this issue; and, instead of recurring to the common arguments, or taking any one's word in the case, let us trust to matter of fact; and if, upon enquiry, it appears that the actions of mankind are not to be accounted for upon any other principle but this of the insufficiency of our enjoyments, 'twill go further towards the establishment of the truth of this part of

the discourse, than a thousand speculative arguments which might be offered upon the occasion.

Now, if we take a survey of the life of man from the time he is come to reason, to the latest decline of it in old age,—we shall find him engaged, and generally hurried on in such a succession of different pursuits, and different opinions of things, through the different stages of his life,—as will admit of no explication but this,—That he finds no rest for the sole of his foot, on any of the plans where he has been led to expect it.

The moment he has got loose from tutors and governors, and is left to judge for himself, and pursue this scheme his own way,—his first thoughts are generally full of the mighty happiness which he is going to enter upon, from the free enjoyment of the pleasures in which he sees others of his age and fortune engaged.

In consequence of this,—take notice how his imagination is caught by every glittering appearance that flatters this expectation.—Observe what impressions are made upon his senses by diversions, musick, dress, and beauty,—and how his spirits are upon the wing, flying in pursuit of them, that you would think he could never have enough.

Leave him to himself a few years, till the edge of appetite is worn down,—and you will scarce know him again. You will find him entered into engagements, and setting up for a man of business and conduct, talking of no other happiness but what centers in projects of making the most of this world, and providing for his children and children's children after them. Examine his notions, he will tell you, that the gayer pleasures of youth are only fit for

those who know not how to dispose of themselves and time to better advantage. That however fair and promising they might appear to a man unpractised in them,—they were no better than a life of folly and impertinence ; and, so far from answering your expectations of happiness, 'twas well if you escaped without pain.—That, in every experiment he had tried, he had found more bitter than sweet ; and, for the little pleasure one could snatch, —it too often left a terrible sting behind it : besides, did the balance lie on the other side, he would tell you there could be no true satisfaction where a life runs on in so giddy a circle, out of which a wise man should extricate himself as soon as he can, that he may begin to look forwards :—that it becomes a man of character and consequence to lay aside childish things, to take care of his interests, to establish the fortune of his family, and place it out of want and dependence : and, in a word, if there is such a thing as happiness upon earth, it must consist in the accomplishment of this ;—and, for his own part, if God should prosper his endeavours so as to be worth such a sum, or to be able to bring such a point to bear,—he shall be one of the happiest of the sons of men.—In full assurance of this, on he drudges,—plots,—contrives,—rises early,—late takes rest, and eats the bread of carefulness, till, at length, by hard labour and perseverance, he has reached, if not outgone, the object he had first in view.—When he has got thus far,—if he is a plain and sincere man, he will make no scruple to acknowledge truly what alteration he has found in himself.—If you ask him,—he will tell you that his imagination painted something before his eyes, the reality of which he has not yet

attained to : that, with all the accumulation of his wealth, he neither lives the merrier, sleeps the sounder, or has less care and anxiety upon his spirits than at his first setting out.

Perhaps, you'll say, some dignity, honour, or title, only is wanting :—Oh ! could I accomplish that, as there would be nothing left then for me to wish, good God ! how happy should I be ! 'tis still the same ; —the dignity or title,—though they crown his head with honour,—add not one cubit to his happiness. —Upon summing up the account, all, all is found to be seated merely in the imagination.—The faster he has pursued, the faster the phantom flies before him ;—and, to use the satirist's comparison of the chariot-wheels,—haste as they will, they must forever keep the same distance.

But what ? though I have been thus far disappointed in my expectations of happiness from the possession of riches,—" Let me try whether I shall " not meet with it in the spending and fashionable " enjoyment of them."

Behold ! I will get me down, and make me great works, and build me houses, and plant me vineyards, and make me gardens and pools of water ; and I will get me servants and maidens ; and whatsoever my eyes desire, I will not keep from them.

In prosecution of this,—he drops all painful pursuits,—withdraws himself from the busy part of the world,—realizes,—pulls down,—builds up again ;— buys statues, pictures,—plants—and plucks up by the roots,—levels mountains—and fills up vallies,—turns rivers into dry ground, and dry ground into rivers ;— says unto this man go, and he goeth ; and unto another, do this, and he doeth it ;—and whatsoever his soul

lusteth after of this kind, he withholds not from it. When every thing is thus planned by himself, and executed according to his wish and direction, surely he is arrived to the accomplishment of his wishes, and has got to the summit of all human happiness?—Let the most fortunate adventurers in this way answer the question for him, and say,—how often it arises higher than a bare and simple amusement,—and well, if you can compound for that,—since, 'tis often purchased at so high a price, and so soured by a mixture of other incidental vexations, as to become too often a work of repentance, which, in the end, will extort the same sorrowful confession from him, which it did from Solomon in the like case,—"Lo! I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do,—and behold all was vanity and vexation of spirit,—and there was no profit to me under the sun."

To inflame this account the more,—it would be no miracle, if, upon casting it up, he has gone farther lengths than he first intended, run into expenses which have entangled his fortune, and brought himself into such difficulties as to make way for the last experiment he can try,—and that is, to turn miser, with no happiness in view but what is to rise out of the little designs of a sordid mind, set upon saving and scraping up all he has injudiciously spent.

In this last stage,—behold him a poor trembling wretch, shut up from all mankind, sinking into utter contempt; spending careful days and sleepless nights in pursuit of what a narrow and contracted heart can never enjoy;—and let us here leave him to the conviction he will one day find,—that there

is no end of his labour,—that his eyes will never be satisfied with riches, or will say,—For whom do I labour and bereave myself of rest?—This is also a sore travel.

I believe this is no uncommon picture of the disappointments of human life,—and the manner our pleasures and enjoyments slip from under us in every stage of our life. And though I would not be thought by it, as if I was denying the reality of pleasures, or disputing the being of them, any more than one would the reality of pain,—yet I must observe on this head, that there is a plain distinction to be made betwixt pleasure and happiness: for, though there can be no happiness without pleasure, —yet the reverse of the proposition will not hold true.—We are so made, that, from the common gratifications of our appetites, and the impressions of a thousand objects, we snatch the one, like a transient gleam, without being suffered to taste the other, and enjoy the perpetual sunshine and fair weather which constantly attend it. This, I contend, is only to be found in religion,—in the consciousness of virtue,—and the sure and certain hopes of a better life, which brightens all our prospects, and leaves no room to dread disappointments, —because the expectation of it is built upon a rock, whose foundations are as deep as those of heaven and hell.

And though, in our pilgrimage through this world,—some of us may be so fortunate as to meet with some clear fountains by the way, that may cool, for a few moments, the heat of this great thirst of happiness,—yet our Saviour, who knew the world, though he enjoyed but little of it, tells us,

that whosoever drinketh of this water will thirst again:—and we all find, by experience, it is so, and by reason that it always must be so.

I conclude with a short observation upon Solomon's evidence in this case.

Never did the busy brain of a lean and hectick chemist search for the philosopher's stone with more pains and ardour than this great man did after happiness. He was one of the wisest enquirers into nature;—had tried all her powers and capacities, and, after a thousand vain speculations and vile experiments, he affirmed, at length, it lay hid in no one thing he had tried. Like the chemist's projections, all had ended in smoke, or, what was worse, in vanity and vexation of spirit.—The conclusion of the whole matter was this,—That he advises every man who would be happy, to fear God and keep his commandments.

SERMON II.

THE HOUSE OF FEASTING AND THE HOUSE OF MOURNING DESCRIBED.

ECCLES. VII. 2, 3.

It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting.

That I deny;—but let us hear the wise man's reasoning upon it,—"for that *is* the end of all men, "and the living *will* lay it to *his* heart: sorrow is "better than laughter:"—for a crack-brain'd order of Carthusian monks, I grant, but not for men of the world. For what purpose, do you imagine, has God made us? for the social sweets of the well-watered vallies, where he has planted us, or for the dry and dismal desert of a Sierra Morena? Are the sad accidents of life, and the uncheery hours which perpetually overtake us, are they not enough, but we must sally forth in quest of them,—belie our own hearts, and say, as your text would have us, that they are better than those of joy? Did the best of Beings send us into the world for this end,—to go weeping through it,—to vex and shorten a life short and vexatious enough already? Do you think, my good preacher, that he who is infinitely happy, can envy us our enjoyments? or that a Being so infinitely kind, would grudge a mournful traveller the short rest and refreshments necessary to support his spirits through the stages of a weary pilgrimage? or

that he would call him to a severe reckoning, because in his way he had hastily snatched at some little fugacious pleasures, merely to sweeten this uneasy journey of life, and reconcile him to the ruggedness of the road, and the many hard jostlings he is sure to meet with? Consider, I beseech you, what provision and accommodation the Author of our being has prepared for us, that we might not go on our way sorrowing:—how many caravanseras of rest!—what powers and faculties he has given us for taking it!—what apt objects he has placed in our way to entertain us!—some of which he has made so fair, so exquisitely fitted for this end, that they have power over us, for a time, to charm away the sense of pain, to cheer up the dejected heart under poverty and sickness, and make it go and remember its miseries no more.

I will not contend, at present, against this rhetorick; I would choose rather for a moment to go on with the allegory, and say we are travellers, and, in the most affecting sense of that idea, that, like travellers, though upon business of the last and nearest concern to us, we may surely be allowed to amuse ourselves with the natural or artificial beauties of the country we are passing through, without reproach of forgetting the main errand we are sent upon; and if we can so order it, as not to be led out of the way, by the variety of prospects, edifices, and ruins which solicit us, it would be a nonsensical piece of saint-errantry to shut our eyes.

But let us not lose sight of the argument in pursuit of the simile.

Let us remember, various as our excursions are, —that we have still set our faces towards Jerusa-

lem :—that we have a place of rest and happiness, towards which we hasten; and that the way to get there is not so much to please our hearts, as to improve them in virtue :—that mirth and feasting are usually no friends to achievements of this kind,—but that a season of affliction is, in some sort, a season of piety,—not only because our sufferings are apt to put us in mind of our sins, but that by the check and interruption which they give to our pursuits, they allow us what the hurry and bustle of the world too often deny us;—and that is, a little time for reflection, which is all that most of us want, to make us wiser and better men :—that at certain times it is so necessary a man's mind should be turned towards itself, that rather than want occasions, he had better purchase them at the expense of his present happiness.—He had better, as the text expresses it, "go to the house of mourning," where he will meet with something to subdue his passions, than to the house of feasting, where the joy and gaiety of the place is likely to excite them. —That whereas the entertainments and caresses of the one place expose his heart and lay it open to temptations;—the sorrows of the other defend it, and as naturally shut them from it. So strange and unaccountable a creature is man! he is so framed, that he cannot but pursue happiness;—and yet, unless he is made sometimes miserable, how apt is he to mistake the way which can only lead him to the accomplishment of his own wishes!

This is the full force of the wise man's declaration.—But to do farther justice to his words, I will endeavour to bring the subject still nearer.—For which purpose, it will be necessary to stop here;

and take a transient view of the two places here referred to,—the house of mourning, and the house of feasting. Give me leave, therefore, I beseech you, to recall both of them for a moment to your imaginations, that from thence I may appeal to your hearts how faithfully, and upon what good grounds, the effects and natural operations of each upon our minds are intimated in the text.

And, first, let us look into the house of feasting.

And here, to be as fair and candid as possible in the description of this, we will not take it from the worst originals, such as are opened merely for the sale of virtue, and so calculated for the end, that the disguise each is under, not only gives power safely to drive on the bargain, but safely to carry it into execution too.

This we will not suppose to be the case;—nor let us even imagine the house of feasting to be such a scene of intemperance and excess as the house of feasting does often exhibit;—but let us take it from one, as little exceptionable as we can,—where there is, or at least appears, nothing really criminal,—but where every thing seems to be kept within the visible bounds of moderation and sobriety.

Imagine then such a house of feasting, where, either by consent or invitation, a number of each sex is drawn together, for no other purpose but the enjoyment and mutual entertainment of each other; which, we will suppose, shall arise from no other pleasures but what custom authorizes, and religion does not absolutely forbid.

Before we enter,—let us examine, what must be the sentiments of each individual previous to his arrival, and we shall find, that however they may dif-

fer from one another in tempers and opinions, that every one seems to agree in this:—that as he is going to a house dedicated to joy and mirth, it was fit he should divest himself of whatever was likely to contradict that intention, or be inconsistent with it.—That for this purpose, he had left his cares,—his serious thoughts,—and his moral reflections behind him, and was come forth from home with only such dispositions and gaiety of heart as suited the occasion, and promoted the intended mirth and jollity of the place. With this preparation of mind, which is as little as can be supposed, since it will amount to no more than a desire in each to render himself an acceptable guest,—let us conceive them entering into the house of feasting with hearts set loose from grave restraints, and open to the expectations of receiving pleasure. It is not necessary, as I premised, to bring intemperance into this scene,—or to suppose such an excess in the gratification of the appetites as shall ferment the blood and set the desires in a flame.—Let us admit no more of it, therefore, than will gently stir them, and fit them for the impressions which so benevolent a commerce will naturally excite. In this disposition, thus wrought upon beforehand, and already improved to this purpose,—take notice how mechanically the thoughts and spirits rise,—how soon and insensibly they are got above the pitch and first bounds which cooler hours would have marked.

When the gay and smiling aspect of things has begun to leave the passages to a man's heart thus thoughtlessly unguarded;—when kind and caressing looks of every object without, that can flatter his senses, have conspired with the enemy within,

to betray him, and put him off his defence;—when musick likewise hath lent her aid, and tried her power upon the passions;—when the voice of singing men, and the voice of singing women, with the sound of the viol and the lute, have broke in upon his soul, and in some tender notes have touched the secret springs of rapture,—that moment let us dissect and look into his heart:—see how vain! how weak! how empty a thing it is! look through its several recesses,—those pure mansions formed for the reception of innocence and virtue:—sad spectacle! behold those fair inhabitants now dispossessed,—turned out of their sacred dwelling, to make room,—for what?—at the best for levity and indiscretion,—perhaps for folly;—it may be for more impure guests, which possibly, in so general a riot of the mind and senses, may take occasion to enter unsuspected at the same time.

In a scene and desposition thus described,—can the most cautious say,—thus far shall my desires go,—and no farther? or will the coolest and most circumspect say, when pleasure has taken full possession of his heart, that no thought nor purpose shall arise there which he would have concealed?—in those loose and unguarded moments, the imagination is not always at command;—in spite of reason and reflection, it will forcibly carry him sometimes whither he would not,—like the unclean spirit, in the parent's sad description of his child's case, which took him, and oft-times cast him into the fire to destroy him; and wheresoever it taketh him it teareth him, and hardly departeth from him.

But this, you'll say, is the worst account of what the mind may suffer here.

Why may we not make more favourable suppositions?—that numbers, by exercise and custom to such encounters, learn gradually to despise and triumph over them;—that the minds of many are not so susceptible of warm impressions, or so badly fortified against them, that pleasure should easily corrupt or soften them;—that it would be hard to suppose, of the great multitudes which daily throng and press into this house of feasting, but that numbers come out of it again with all the innocence with which they entered;—and that, if both sexes are included in the computation, what *fair* examples shall we see of many of so pure and chaste a turn of mind,—that the house of feasting, with all its charms and temptations, was never able to excite a thought, or awaken an inclination which virtue need to blush at,—or which the most scrupulous conscience might not support. God forbid we should say otherwise:—no doubt, numbers of all ages escape unhurt, and get off this dangerous sea without shipwreck. Yet are they not to be reckoned amongst the most fortunate adventurers;—and though one would not absolutely prohibit the attempt, or be so cynical as to condemn every one who tries it, since there are so many, I suppose, who cannot well do otherwise, and whose condition and situation in life unavoidably force them upon it,—yet we may be allowed to describe this fair and flattering coast,—we may point out the unsuspected dangers of it, and warn the unwary passenger where they lie. We may shew him what hazards his youth and inexperience will run, how little he can gain by the venture, and how much wiser and better it would be (as is implied in the text) to seek occasions rather to improve his little

stock of virtue, than incautiously expose it to so unequal a chance, where the best he can hope is to return safe with what treasure he carried out,—but where, probably, he may be so unfortunate as to lose it all,—be lost himself,—and undone for ever.

Thus much for the house of feasting; which, by the way, though generally open at other times of the year throughout the world, is supposed, in christian countries, now everywhere to be universally shut up. And, in truth, I have been more full in my cautions against it, not only as reason requires,—but in reverence to this season,* wherein our church exacts a more particular forbearance and self-denial in this point, and thereby adds to the restraints upon pleasure and entertainments which this representation of things has suggested against them already.

Here, then, let us turn aside from this gay scene; and suffer me to take you with me for a moment to one much fitter for your meditation. Let us go into the house mourning, made so by such afflictions as have been brought in, merely by the common cross accidents and disasters to which our condition is exposed;—where, perhaps, the aged parents sit broken-hearted, pierced to their souls with the folly and indiscretion of a thankless child,—the child of their prayers, in whom all their hopes and expectations centered.—Perhaps a more affecting scene:—A virtuous family lying pinched with want, where the unfortunate support of it, having long struggled with a train of misfortunes, and bravely fought up against them,—is now piteously borne down at the

* Preached in Lent.

last,—overwhelmed with a cruel blow which no forecast or frugality could have prevented !—O God ! look upon his afflictions !—Behold him distracted with many sorrows, surrounded with the tender pledges of his love, and the partner of his cares,—without bread to give them ! unable, from the remembrance of better days, to dig ;—to beg, ashamed.

When we enter into the house of mourning, such as this,—it is impossible to insult the unfortunate, even with an improper look.—Under whatever levity and dissipation of heart such objects catch our eyes,—they catch likewise our attentions, collect and call home our scatter'd thoughts, and exercise them with wisdom. A transient scene of distress, such as is here sketched, how soon does it furnish materials to set the mind at work ! how necessarily does it engage it to the consideration of the miseries and misfortunes, the dangers and calamities to which the life of man is subject ! By holding up such a glass before it, it forces the mind to see and reflect upon the vanity,—the perishing condition and uncertain tenure of every thing in this world. From reflections of this serious cast, how insensibly do the thoughts carry us farther !—and, from considering what we are,—what kind of world we live in, and what evils befall us in it, how naturally do they set us to look forwards at what possibly we shall be !—for what kind of world we are intended, —what evils may befall us there,—and what provision we should make against them here, whilst we have time and opportunity.

If these lessons are so inseparable from the house of mourning here supposed,—we shall find it a still

more instructive school of wisdom when we take a view of the place in that more affecting light to which the wise man seems to confine it in the text; in which, by the house of mourning, I believe, he means that particular scene of sorrow, where there is lamentation and mourning for the dead.

Turn in hither, I beseech you, for a moment. Behold a dead man ready to be carried out; the only son of his mother, and she a widow! Perhaps a more affecting spectacle:—a kind and indulgent father of a numerous family, lies breathless;—snatched away in the strength of his age;—torn in an evil hour from his children and the bosom of a disconsolate wife!

Behold much people of the city gathered together to mix their tears, with settled sorrow in their looks, going heavily along to the house of mourning, to perform that last melancholy office, which, when the debt of nature is paid, we are called upon to pay to each other.

If the sad occasion which leads him there has not done it already, take notice to what a serious and devout frame of mind every man is reduced the moment he enters this gate of affliction. The busy and fluttering spirits, which in the house of mirth were wont to transport him from one diverting object to another,—see how they are fallen! how peaceably they are laid! In this gloomy mansion, full of shades and uncomfortable damps to seize the soul,—see, the light and easy heart, which never knew what it was to think before, how pensive it is now! how soft! how susceptible! how full of religious impressions! how deeply it is smitten with a sense and with a love of virtue! Could we, in this

crisis, whilst this empire of reason and religion lasts, and the heart is thus exercised with wisdom and busied with heavenly contemplations,—could we see it naked as it is,—stripped of its passions, unspotted by the world, and regardless of its pleasures,—we might then safely rest our cause upon this single evidence, and appeal to the most sensual, whether Solomon has not made a just determination here in favour of the house of mourning?—not for its own sake, but as it is fruitful in virtue, and becomes the occasion of so much good. Without this end, sorrow, I own, has no use but to shorten a man's days;—nor can gravity, with all its studied solemnity of look and carriage, serve any end but to make one half of the world merry, and impose upon the other.

Consider what has been said; and may God of his mercy bless you! Amen.

SERMON III.

PHILANTHROPY RECOMMENDED.

LUKE X. 36, 37.

Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell amongst the thieves?—And he said, he that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him,—Go, and do thou likewise.

In the foregoing verses of this chapter, the Evangelist relates, that a certain lawyer stood up and tempted Jesus, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?—To which inquiry our Saviour, as his manner was, when any ensnaring question was put to him, which he saw proceeded more from a design to entangle him, than an honest view of getting information,—instead of giving a direct answer, which might afford a handle to malice, or at best serve only to gratify an impertinent humour,—he immediately retorts the question upon the man who asked it, and unavoidably puts him upon the necessity of answering himself;—and, as in the present case, the particular profession of the inquirer, and his supposed general knowledge of all other branches of learning, left no room to suspect he could be ignorant of the true answer to this question; and especially, of what every one knew was delivered upon that head by their great legislator; our Saviour therefore refers him to his own memory of what he had found there in the course of his stud-

ies:—What is written in the law, how readest thou?—Upon which the inquirer, reciting the general heads of our duty to God and man, as delivered in the 18th of Leviticus and the 6th of Deuteronomy;—namely,—"That we should worship the Lord our "God with all our hearts, and love our neighbour "as ourselves;" our blessed Saviour tells him, he had answered right; and if he followed that lesson, he could not fail of the blessing he seemed desirous to inherit.—"This do, and thou shalt live."

But he, as the context tells us, willing to justify himself,—willing possibly to gain more credit in the conference, or hoping, perhaps, to hear such a partial and narrow definition of the word *neighbour* as would suit his own principles, and justify some particular oppressions of his own, or those of which his whole order lay under an accusation,—says unto Jesus, in the 29th verse,—"And who is my neigh-"bour?"—Though the demand at first sight may seem utterly trifling, yet was it far from being so in fact. For, according as you understood the term in a more or less restrained sense,—it produced many necessary variations in the duties you owed from that relation.—Our blessed Saviour, to rectify any partial and pernicious mistake in this matter, and to place at once this duty of the love of our neighbour upon its true bottom of philanthropy and universal kindness, makes answer to the proposed question, not by any far-fetched refinement from the schools of the rabbies, which might have sooner silenced than convinced the man,—but by a direct appeal to human nature, in an instance he relates of a man falling amongst thieves, left in the greatest distress imaginable, till by chance a Samaritan,

an utter stranger, coming where he was, by an act of great goodness and compassion, not only relieved him at present, but took him under his protection, and generously provided for his future safety.

On the close of which engaging account,—our Saviour appeals to the man's own heart, in the first verse of the text,—"Which now of these three, "thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell "amongst the thieves?"—and instead of drawing the inference himself, leaves him to decide in favour of so noble a principle so evidently founded in mercy.—The lawyer, struck with the truth and justice of the doctrine, and frankly acknowledging the force of it, our blessed Saviour concludes the debate with a short admonition, that he would practise what he had approved,—and go, and imitate that fair example of universal benevolence which it had set before him.

In the remaining part of the discourse I shall follow the same plan; and, therefore, shall beg leave to enlarge first upon the story itself, with such reflections as will arise from it; and conclude, as our Saviour has done, with the same exhortation to kindness and humanity which so naturally falls from it.

A certain man, says our Saviour, went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his raiment, and departed, leaving him half-dead.—There is something in our nature which engages us to take part in every accident to which man is subject, from what cause soever it may have happened; but in such calamities as a man has fallen into through mere misfortune, to be charged upon no fault or indiscretion of himself,

there is something then so truly interesting,—that, at first sight, we generally make them our own, not altogether from a reflection that they might have been or may be so, but oftener from a certain generosity and tenderness of nature which disposes us for compassion, abstracted from all considerations of self: so that, without any observable act of the will, we suffer with the unfortunate, and feel a weight upon our spirits we know not why, on seeing the most common instances of their distress. But where the spectacle is uncommonly tragical, and complicated with many circumstances of misery, the mind is then taken captive at once, and, *were* it inclined to it, has no power to make resistance; but surrenders itself to all the tender emotions of pity and deep concern. So that when one considers the friendly part of our nature without looking farther, one would think it impossible for a man to look upon misery without finding himself in some measure attached to the interest of him who suffers it.—I say, one would think it impossible,—for there are some tempers—(how shall I describe them?)—formed either of such impenetrable matter, or wrought up by habitual selfishness to such an utter insensibility of what becomes of the fortunes of their fellow-creatures, as if they were not partakers of the same nature, or had no lot or connection at all with the species.

Of this character, our Saviour produces two disgraceful instances in the behaviour of a Priest and a Levite, whom in this account he represents as coming to the place where the unhappy man was;—both passing by without either stretching forth a hand to assist, or uttering a word to comfort him in his distress.

And by chance there came down a certain priest! —Merciful God! that a teacher of thy religion should ever want humanity!—or that a man, whose head might be thought full of the one, should have a heart void of the other!—This however was the case before us;—and though in theory one would scarce suspect that the least pretence to religion, and an open disregard to so main a part of it, could ever meet together in one person,—yet, in fact, it is no fictitious character.

Look into the world.—How often do you behold a sordid wretch, whose strait heart is open to no man's affliction, taking shelter behind an appearance of piety, and putting on the garb of religion, which none but the merciful and compassionate have a title to wear! Take notice, with what sanctity he goes to the end of his days, in the same selfish track in which he at first set out,—turning neither to the right hand nor to the left,—but plods on;—pores all his life-long upon the ground, as if afraid to look up, lest, peradventure, he should see aught which might turn him one moment out of that straight line where interest is carrying;—or if, by chance, he stumbles upon a hapless object of distress, which threatens such a disaster to him,—like the man here represented, *devoutly* passing by on the other side, as if unwilling to trust himself to the impressions of nature, or hazard the inconveniences which pity might lead him into upon the occasion.

There is but one stroke wanting in this picture of an unmerciful man, to render the character utterly odious; and that our Saviour gives in the following instance he relates upon it. And likewise, says he,

"a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked at him." It was not a transient oversight, the hasty or ill-advised neglect of an unconsidering humour, with which the best disposed are sometimes overtaken, and led on beyond the point where otherwise they would have wished to stop.—No!—on the contrary, it had all the aggravation of a deliberate act of insensibility proceeding from a hard heart. When he was at the place, he came and looked at him,—considered his misfortunes, gave time for reason and nature to have awoke,—saw the imminent danger he was in,—and the pressing necessity of immediate help, which so violent a case called aloud for; and after all,—turned aside, and unmercifully left him to all the distresses of his condition.

In all unmerciful actions, the worst of men pay this compliment at least to humanity, as to endeavour to wear as much of the appearance of it as the case will well let them;—so that, in the hardest acts a man shall be guilty of, he has some motives, true or false, always ready to offer, either to satisfy himself or the world,—and, God knows, too often to impose both upon the one and the other. And therefore it would be no hard matter here to give a probable guess at what passed in the Levite's mind in the present case, and shew, was it necessary, by what kind of casuistry he settled the matter with his conscience as he passed by, and guarded all the passages to his heart against the inroads which pity might attempt to make upon the occasion.—But it is painful to dwell long upon this disagreeable part of the story; I therefore hasten to the concluding incident of it, which is so amiable, that one cannot easily be too copious in reflections upon it.—And

behold, says our Saviour, a certain Samaritan as he journeyed, came where he was; and when he saw him he had compassion on him,—and went to him, —bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine,— set him upon his own beast, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.—I suppose, it will be scarce necessary here to remind you, that the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans:—an old religious grudge,—the worst of all grudges,—had wrought such a dislike between both people, that they held themselves mutually discharged not only from all offices of friendship and kindness, but even from the most common acts of courtesy and good manners. This operated so strongly in our Saviour's time, that the woman of Samaria seemed astonished that he, being a Jew, should ask water of her, who was a Samaritan;—so that with such a prepossession, however distressful the case of the unfortunate man was, and how reasonably soever he might plead for pity from another man, there was little aid or consolation to be looked for from so unpromising a quarter. 'Alas! after I have been twice passed by, neglected by men of my own nation and religion, bound by so many ties to assist me, left here friendless and unpitied both by a Priest and a Levite, men whose profession and superior advantages of knowledge could not leave them in the dark in what manner they should discharge this debt which my condition claims,—after this,— what hopes? what expectations from a passenger, not only a stranger,—but a Samaritan, released from all obligations to me, and by a national dislike, inflamed by mutual ill offices, now made my enemy, and more likely to rejoice at the evils

'which have fallen upon me, than to stretch forth 'a hand to save me from them!'

'Tis no unnatural soliloquy to imagine; but the actions of generous and compassionate tempers baffle all little reasonings about them.—True charity, in the apostle's description, as it is kind, and is not easily provoked, so it manifested this character here;—for we find, when he came where he was, and beheld his distress,—all the unfriendly passions, which at another time might have rose within him, now utterly forsook him and fled: when he saw his misfortunes,—he forgot his enmity towards the man,—dropped all the prejudices which education had planted against him; and in the room of them, all that was good and compassionate was suffered to speak in his behalf.

In benevolent natures the impulse to pity is so sudden, that like instruments of musick which obey the touch,—the objects which are fitted to excite such impressions work so instantaneous an effect, that you would think the will was scarce concerned, and that the mind was altogether passive in the sympathy which her own goodness has excited. The truth is,—the soul is generally in such cases so busily taken up, and wholly engrossed by the object of pity, that she does not attend to her own operations, or take leisure to examine the principles upon which she acts. So that the Samaritan, though the moment he saw him he had compassion on him, yet, sudden as the emotion is represented, you are not to imagiae that it was mechanical, but that there was a settled principle of humanity and goodness which operated within him, and influenced not only the first impulse of kindness, but the con-

tinuation of it throughout the rest of so engaging a behaviour. And because it is a pleasure to look into a good mind, and trace out, as far as one is able, what passes within it on such occasions, I shall beg leave for a moment to state an account of what was likely to pass in his, and in what manner so distressful a case would necessarily work upon such a disposition.

As he approached the place where the unfortunate man lay, the instant he beheld him, no doubt some such train of reflections as these would rise in his mind :—" Good God ! what a spectacle of " misery do I behold !——a man stripped of his " raiment,—wounded,—lying languishing before " me upon the ground, just ready to expire,—with- " out the comfort of a friend to support him in his " last agonies, or the prospect of a hand to close his " eyes when his pains are over ! But perhaps my " concern should lessen when I reflect on the rela- " tions in which we stand to each other,—that he " is a Jew, and I a Samaritan.——But are we not " still both men ? partakers of the same nature,— " and subject to the same evils ?—Let me change " conditions with him for a moment and consider, " had his lot befallen me as I journeyed in the way, " what measure I should have expected at his hand. " —Should I wish, when he beheld me wounded " and half-dead, that he should shut up his bowels " of compassion from me, and double the weight of " my miseries by passing by and leaving them un- " pitied ?—But I am a stranger to the man ;—be it " so,—but I am no stranger to his condition ;—mis- " fortunes are of no particuiar tribe or nation, but " belong to us all,—and have a general claim upon

" us, without distinction of climate, country, or re-
" ligion. Besides, though I am a stranger,—'tis
" no fault of his that I do not know him, and there-
" fore unequitable he should suffer by it :—Had I
" known him, possibly I should have had cause to
" love and pity him the more ;—for aught I know,
" he is some one of uncommon merit, whose life is
" rendered still more precious, as the lives and
" happiness of others may be involved in it : per-
" haps at this instant that he lies here forsaken, in
" all this misery, a whole virtuous family is joyfully
" looking for his return, and affectionately counting
" the hours of his delay ! Oh ! did they know what
" evil had befallen him,—how would they fly to suc-
" cour him !—Let me then hasten to supply those
" tender offices of binding up his wounds, and car-
" rying him to a place of safety ;—or, if that assist-
" ance comes too late, I shall comfort him at least
" in his last hour ;—and, if I can do nothing else,—
" I shall soften his misfortunes by dropping a tear
" of pity over them."

'Tis almost necessary to imagine the good Samaritan was influenced by some such thoughts as these, from the uncommon generosity of his behaviour, which is represented by our Saviour operating like the warm zeal of a brother, mixed with the affectionate discretion and care of a parent, who was not satisfied with taking him under his protection, and supplying his present wants, but in looking forwards for him, and taking care that his wants should be supplied when he should be gone, and no longer near to befriend him.

I think there needs no stronger argument to prove how universally and deeply the seeds of this

virtue of compassion are planted in the heart of man, than in the pleasure we take in such representations of it: and though some men have represented human nature in other colours (though to what end I know not) yet the matter of fact is so strong against him, that from the general propensity to pity the unfortunate, we express that sensation by the word humanity, as if it was inseparable from our nature. That it is not inseparable, I have allowed in the former part of this discourse, from some reproachful instances of selfish tempers, which seem to take part in nothing beyond themselves; yet I am persuaded, and affirm 'tis still so great and noble a part of our nature, that a man must do great violence to himself, and suffer many a painful conflict, before he has brought himself to a different disposition.

'Tis observable in the foregoing account, that when the priest came to the place where he was, he passed by on the other side;—he might have passed by, you'll say, without turning aside.—No; there is a secret shame which attends every act of inhumanity, not to be conquered in the hardest natures; so that, as in other cases, so especially in this, many a man will do a cruel act, who at the same time will blush to look you in the face, and is forced to turn aside before he can have a heart to execute his purpose.

Inconsistent creature that man is! who at that instant that he does what is wrong, is not able to withhold his testimony to what is good and praiseworthy!

I have now done with the parable, which was the first part proposed to be considered in this discourse; and should proceed to the second, which so

naturally falls from it, of exhorting you, as our Saviour did the lawyer upon it, to go and do so likewise: but I have been so copious in my reflections upon the story itself, that I find I have insensibly incorporated into them almost all that I should have said here in recommending so amiable an example; by which means I have unwares anticipated the task I proposed. I shall therefore detain you no longer than with a single remark upon the subject in general, which is this:—'tis observable in many places of scripture, that our blessed Saviour, in describing the day of judgment, does it in such a manner, as if the great enquiry then, was to relate principally to this one virtue of compassion,—and as if our final sentence at that solemnity was to be pronounced exactly according to the degress of it. "I was a hungered, and ye gave me meat;—thirsty, and ye "gave me drink;—naked, and ye clothed me;—I "was sick, and ye visited me;—in prison, and ye "came unto me." Not that we are to imagine from thence, as if any other good or evil action should then be overlooked by the eye of the all-seeing Judge, but barely to intimate to us, that a charitable and benevolent disposition is so principal and ruling a part of a man's character, as to be a considerable test by itself of the whole frame and temper of his mind, with which all other virtues and vices respectively rise and fall, and will almost necessarily be connected.—Tell me therefore of a compassionate man, you represent to me a man of a thousand other good qualities;—on whom I can depend,—whom I may safely trust with my wife,—my children,—my fortune and reputation:—'Tis for this, as the apostle argues from the same principle,—"that he will

not commit adultery,—that he will not kill,—that he will not steal,—that he will not bear false witness." That is, the sorrows which are stirred up in men's hearts by such trespasses, are so tenderly felt by a compassionate man, that it is not in his power or his nature to commit them.

So that well might he conclude, that charity, by which he means love to your neighbour, was the end of the commandment; and that whosoever fulfilled it, had fulfilled the law.

Now to God, &c. Amen.

SERMON IV.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE.

2 SAM. XII. 7.

And Nathan said unto David, thou art the man.

THERE is no historical passage in scripture which gives a more remarkable instance of the deceitfulness of the heart of man to itself, and of how little we truly know of ourselves, than this, wherein David is convicted out of his own mouth, and is led by the prophet to condemn and pronounce a severe judgment upon another, for an act of injustice, which he had passed over in himself, and possibly reconciled to his own conscience. To know one's self, one would think could be no very difficult lesson ;—for who, you'll say, can well be truly ignorant of himself, and the true disposition of his own heart? If a man thinks at all, he cannot be a stranger to what passes there ;—he must be conscious of his own thoughts and desires, he must remember his past pursuits, and the true springs and motives which in general have directed the actions of his life: he may hang out false colours and deceive the world ; but how can a man deceive himself? That a man can, is evident, because he daily does so.—Scripture tells us, and gives us many historical proofs of it, besides this to which the text refers :—" That " the heart of man is treacherous to itself, and de-

"ceitful above all things;" and experience and every hour's commerce with the world confirms the truth of this seeming paradox, "that though man "is the only creature endowed with reflection, and "consequently qualified to know the most of him-"self;—yet, so it happens, that he generally knows "the least;—and with all the power which God has "given him of turning his eyes inward upon him-"self, and taking notice of the chain of his own "thoughts and desires,—yet, in fact, is generally so "inattentive, but always so partial an observer of "what passes, that he is as much, nay often a much "greater stranger to his own disposition and true "character, than all the world besides!"

By what means he is brought under so manifest a delusion, and how he suffers himself to be so grossly imposed upon in a point which he is capable of knowing so much better than others, is not hard to give an account of, nor need we seek farther for it than amongst the causes which are every day perverting his reason and misleading him. We are deceived in judging of ourselves, just as we are in judging of other things, when our passions and inclinations are called in as counsellors, and we suffer ourselves to see and reason just so far and no farther than they give us leave. How hard do we find it to pass an equitable and sound judgment in a matter where our interest is deeply concerned!—and even where there is the remotest consideration of SELF connected with the point before us, what a strange bias does it hang upon our minds, and how difficult is it to disengage our judgments entirely from it! With what reluctance are we brought to think evil of a friend whom we have long loved and

esteemed! and though there happens to be strong appearances against him, how apt are we to overlook or put favourable constructions upon them, and even sometimes, when our zeal and friendship transport us, to assign the best and kindest motives for the worst and most unjustifiable parts of his conduct!

We are still worse casuists; and the deceit is proportionably stronger with a man, when he is going to judge of himself,—that dearest of all parties,—so closely connected with him,—so much and so long beloved,—of whom he has so early conceived the highest opinion and esteem, and with whose merit he has all along, no doubt, found so much reason to be contented. It is not an easy matter to be severe, where there is such an impulse to be kind,—or to efface at once all the tender impressions in favour of so old a friend, which disabled us from thinking of him as he is, and seeing him in the light, may be, in which every one else sees him.

So that, however easy this knowledge of one's self may appear at first sight, it is otherwise when we come to examine; since not only in practice, but even in speculation and theory, we find it one of the hardest and most painful lessons. Some of the earliest instructors of mankind, no doubt, found it so too; and for that reason soon saw the necessity of laying such a stress upon this great precept of self-knowledge, which, for its excellent wisdom and usefulness, many of them supposed to be a divine direction; that it came down from heaven, and comprehended the whole circle both of the knowledge and the duty of man. And indeed their zeal might easily be allowed in so high an encomium upon the attainment of a virtue, the want of which

so often baffled their instructions, and rendered their endeavours of reforming the heart vain and useless. For who could think of a reformation of the faults without him, who knew not where they lay, or could set about correcting, till he had first come to a sense of the defects which required it?

But this was a point always much easier recommended by publick instructors than shewn how to be put in practice: and therefore others, who equally sought the reformation of mankind, observing that this direct road which led to it was guarded on all sides by self-love, and consequently very difficult to open access, soon found out that a different and more artful course was requisite; as they had not strength to remove this flattering passion which stood in their way and blocked up all the passages to the heart, they endeavoured by stratagem to get beyond it, and by a skilful address, if possible, to deceive it. This gave rise to the early manner of conveying their instructions in parables, fables, and such sort of indirect applications; which, though they could not conquer this principle of self-love, yet often laid it asleep, or at least over-reached it for a few moments, till a just judgment could be procured.

The prophet Nathan seems to have been a great master in this way of address. David had greatly displeased God by two grievous sins which he had committed; and the prophet's commission was to go and bring him to a conviction of them, and touch his heart with a sense of guilt for what he had done against the honour and life of Uriah.

The holy man knew, that was it any one's case but David's own, no man would have been so quick-sighted in discerning the nature of the injury,—

more ready to have redressed it,—or who would have felt more compassion for the party who had suffered it, than he himself.

Instead therefore of declaring the real intention of his errand, by a direct accusation and reproof for the crimes he had committed, he comes to him with fictitious complaint of a cruel act of injustice done by another, and accordingly he frames a case, not so parallel to David's as he supposed would awaken his suspicion, and prevent a patient and candid hearing; and yet not so void of resemblance in the main circumstances, as to fail of striking him when shewn in a proper light.

And Nathan came and said unto him, "There "were two men in one city, the one rich and the "other poor;—the rich man had exceeding many "flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing "save one little ewe-lamb which he had bought and "nourished up;—and it grew up together with him "and with his children;—it did eat of his own meat, "and drink of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, "and was unto him as a daughter:—and there came "a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to "take of his own flock and of his own herd to dress "for the wayfaring man that was come unto him, "but took the poor man's lamb and dressed it for "the man that was come unto him."

The case was drawn up with great judgment and beauty;—the several minute circumstances which heightened the injury, truly affecting,—and so strongly urged, that it would have been impossible for any man with a previous sense of guilt upon his mind, to have defended himself from some degree of remorse, which it must naturally have excited.

The story, though it spoke only of the injustice and oppressive act of another man,—yet it pointed to what he had lately done himself, with all the circumstances of its aggravation;—and withal, the whole was so tenderly addressed to the heart and passions, as to kindle at once the utmost horror and indignation. And so it did;—but not against the proper person. In his transport he forgot himself;—his anger greatly kindled against the man;—and he said unto Nathan, "As the Lord liveth, the man "that hath done this thing shall surely die, and he "shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did "this thing, and because he had no pity."

It can scarce be doubted here, but that David's anger was real, and that he was, what he appeared to be, greatly provoked and exasperated against the offender: and, indeed, his sentence against him proves he was so, above measure. For to punish the man with death, and oblige him to restore fourfold besides, was highly unequitable, and not only disproportioned to the offence, but far above the utmost rigour and severity of the law, which allowed a much softer atonement; requiring, in such a case, no more than an ample restitution and recompense in kind. The judgment, however, seems to have been truly sincere and well-meant, and bespoke rather the honest rashness of an unsuspicious judge, than the cool determination of a conscious and guilty man, who knew he was going to pass sentence upon himself.

I take notice of this particular, because it places this instance of self-deceit, which is the subject of the discourse, in the strongest light, and fully demonstrates the truth of a fact in this great man,

which happens every day among ourselves, namely, that a man may be guilty of very bad and dishonest actions, and yet reflect so little, or so partially, upon what he has done, as to keep his conscience free, not only from guilt, but even the remotest suspicions, that he is the man which in truth he is, and what the tenor and evidence of his life demonstrate. If we look into the world,—David's is no uncommon case;—we see some one or other perpetually copying this bad original, sitting in judgment upon himself,—hearing his own cause, and not knowing what he is doing; hasty in passing sentence, and even executing it too with wrath upon the person of another, when, in the language of the prophet, one might say to him with justice,—"Thou art the "man."

Of the many revengeful, covetous, false, and ill-natured persons which we complain of in the world, though we all join in the cry against them, what man amongst us singles out himself as a criminal, or ever once takes it into his head that he adds to the number?—or where is there a man so bad, who would not think it the hardest and most unfair imputation, to have any of those particular vices laid to his charge?

If he has the symptoms ever so strong upon him, which he would pronounce infallible in another, they are indications of no such malady in himself.—He sees, what no one else sees, some secret and flattering circumstances in his favour, which no doubt make a wide difference betwixt his case and the party's which he condemns.

What other man speaks so often and vehemently against the vice of pride, sets the weakness of it in

a more odious light, or is more hurt with it in another, than the proud man himself? It is the same with the passionate, the designing, the ambitious, and some other common characters in life; and being a consequence of the nature of such vices, and almost inseparable from them, the effects of it are generally so gross and absurd, that where pity does not forbid, it is pleasant to observe and trace the cheat through the several turnings and windings of the heart, and detect it through all the shapes and appearances which it puts on.

Next to these instances of self-deceit and utter ignorance of our true disposition and character, which appear in not seeing *that* in ourselves which shocks us in another man, there is another species still more dangerous and delusive, and which the more guarded perpetually fall into from the judgments they make of different vices, according to their age and complexion, and the various ebbs and flows of their passions and desires.

To conceive this, let any man look into his own heart, and observe in how different a degree of detestation, numbers of actions stand there, though equally bad and vicious in themselves: he will soon find that such of them as strong inclination or custom has prompted him to commit, are generally dressed out, and painted with all the false beauties which a soft and flattering hand can give them; and and that the others, to which he feels no propensity, appear at once naked and deformed, surrounded with all the true circumstances of their folly and dishonour.

When David surprised Saul sleeping in the cave, and cut off the skirt of his robe, we read, his heart

smote him for what he had done :—strange, it smote him not in this matter of Uriah, where it had so much stronger reason to take the alarm !—A whole year had almost passed from the first commission of this injustice, to the time the prophet was sent to reprove him ; and we read not once of any remorse or compunction of heart for what he had done : and it is not to be doubted, had the same prophet met him when he was returning up out of the cave,—and told him, that, scrupulous and conscientious as he then seemed and thought himself to be, he was deceiving himself, and was capable of committing the foulest and most dishonourable actions ;—that he should one day murder a faithful and a valiant servant, whom he ought in justice to have loved and honoured ;—that he should without pity first wound him in the tenderest part, by taking away his dearest possession,—and then unmercifully and treacherously rob him of his life :—had Nathan in a prophetick spirit foretold to David that he was capable of this, and that he should one day actually do it, and from no other motive but the momentary gratification of a base and unworthy passion, he would have received the prediction with horror, and said possibly with Hazael upon just such another occasion, and with the same ignorance of himself,—" What ! is thy servant a dog that he should do this " great thing ?" And yet in all likelihood, at that very time there wanted nothing but the same degree of temptation, and the same opportunity to induce him to the sin which afterwards overcame him.

Thus the case stands with us still. When the passions are warmed, the sin which presents itself exactly tallies to the desire, observe how impetu-

ously a man will rush into it, and act against all principles of honour, justice, and mercy !—Talk to him the moment after upon the nature of another vice to which he is not addicted, and from which perhaps his age, his temper, or rank in life secure him ; take notice, how well he reasons,—with what equity he determines,—what an honest indignation and sharpness he expresses against it, and how insensibly his anger kindles against the man who hath done this thing !

Thus we are nice in grains and scruples,—but knaves in matters of a pound weight ; every day straining at gnats, yet swallowing camels ;—miserably cheating ourselves, and torturing our reason to bring us in such a report of the sin as suits the present appetite and inclination.

Most of us are aware of and pretend to detest the barefaced instances of that hypocrisy by which men deceive others ; but few of us are upon our guard, or see that more fatal hypocrisy by which we deceive and over-reach our own hearts ! It is a flattering and dangerous distemper, which has undone thousands ;—we bring the seeds of it along with us into the world,—they insensibly grow up with us from our childhood,—they lie long concealed and undisturbed, and have generally got such deep root in our natures by the time we are come to years of understanding and reflection, that it requires all we have got to defend ourselves from their effects.

To make the ease still worse on our sides, 'tis with this as with every grievous distemper of the body,—the remedies are dangerous and doubtful, in proportion to our mistakes and ignorance of the cause : for in the instances of self-deceit, though

the head is sick, and the whole heart faint, the patient seldom knows what he ails. Of all the things we know and learn, this necessary knowledge comes to us the last.

Upon what principle it happens thus, I have endeavoured to lay open in the first part of this discourse; which I conclude with a serious exhortation to struggle against them: which we can only hope to do, by conversing more and oftener with ourselves, than the business and diversions of the world generally give us leave.

We have a chain of thoughts, desires, engagements, and idlenesses, which perpetually return upon us in their proper time and order:—let us, I beseech you, assign and set apart some small portion of the day for this purpose,—of retiring into ourselves, and searching into the dark corners and recesses of the heart, and taking notice of what is passing there. If a man can bring himself to do this task with a curious and impartial eye, he will quickly find the fruits of it will more than recompense his time and labour. He will see several irregularities and unsuspected passions within him which he never was aware of:—he will discover in his progress many secret turnings and windings in his heart to which he was a stranger, which now gradually open and disclose themselves to him upon a nearer view. In these labyrinths he will trace out such hidden springs and motives for many of his most applauded actions, as will make him rather sorry and ashamed of himself, than proud.

In a word, he will understand his errors, and then see the necessity, with David, of imploring God to cleanse him from his secret faults,—and with some

hope and confidence to say, with this great man after his conviction,—"Try me, O God, and seek the "ground of my heart;—prove me, and examine my "thoughts;—look well if there be any way of wick-"edness in me,—and lead me in the way everlasting."

Now to God the Father, &c. &c.

SERMON V.

THE CASE OF ELIJAH AND THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH CONSIDERED.

A CHARITY SERMON.

TO THE

VERY REVEREND

RICHARD OSBALDISTON, D. D.

DEAN OF YORK.

SIR,

I HAVE taken the liberty to inscribe this Discourse to you, in testimony of the great respect which I owe to your character in general; and from a sense of what is due to it in particular, from every member of the *Church of York*.

I wish I had as good a reason for doing that, which has given me the opportunity of making so publick and just an acknowledgment; being afraid there can be little left to be said upon the subject of *Charity*, which has not been often thought, and much better expressed by many who have gone before: and, indeed, it seems so beaten and common a path, that it is not an easy matter for a newcomer to distinguish himself in it, by any thing except the novelty of his *vehicle*.

I beg, however, sir, your kind acceptance of it, and of motives which have induced me to address it you; one of which I cannot conceal in justice to myself, because it has proceeded from the sense of many favours and civilities which I have received from you.

I am, Reverend Sir,
your most obliged,
and faithful humble servant,

LAWRENCE STERNE.

SERMON V.

THE CASE OF ELIJAH AND THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH CONSIDERED.

1 KINGS XVII. 16.

And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord which he spake by the prophet Elijah.

THE words of the text are the record of a miracle wrought in behalf of the widow of Zarephath, who had charitably taken Elijah under her roof, and administered unto him in a time of great scarcity and distress. There is something very interesting and affectionate in the manner this story is related in holy writ; and, as it concludes with a second still more remarkable proof of God's favour to the same person, in the restoration of her dead son to life, one cannot but consider both miracles as rewards of that act of piety, wrought by Infinite Power, and left upon record in scripture, not merely as testimonies of the prophet's divine mission, but likewise as two encouraging instances of God Almighty's blessing upon works of charity and benevolence.

In this view I have made choice of this piece of sacred history, which I shall beg leave to make use of as the ground-work for an exhortation to charity in general: and, that it may better answer the particular purpose of this solemnity, I will endeavour to enlarge upon it with such reflections as, I trust in

God, will excite some sentiments of compassion, which may be profitable to so pious a design.

Elijah had fled from two dreadful evils; the approach of a famine, and the persecution of Ahab—an enraged enemy: and, in obedience to the command of God, had hid himself in the brook Cherith that is before Jordan. In this safe and peaceful solitude, blessed with daily marks of God's providence, the holy man dwelt, free both from the cares and glories of the world: by miraculous impulse, "the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook;" till, by continuance of drought (the windows of heaven being shut up in those days for three years and six months, which was the natural cause likewise of the famine) it came to pass, after a while, that the brook, the great fountain of his support, dried up; and he is again directed, by the word of the Lord, where to betake himself for shelter. He is commanded to arise and go to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, with an assurance that he had disposed the heart of a widow-woman there to sustain him.

The prophet follows the call of his God; the same hand which brought him to the gate of the city, had led also the poor widow out of her doors, oppressed with sorrow. She had come forth upon a melancholy errand, to make preparation to eat her last meal, and share it with her child.

No doubt, she had long fenced against this tragical event with all the thrifty management which self-preservation and parental love could inspire; full, no doubt, of cares and many tender apprehensions, lest the slender stock should fail them before the return of plenty.

But as she was a widow, having lost the only faithful friend who would best have assisted her in this virtuous struggle, the present necessity of the times at length overcame her, and she was just falling down an easy prey to it, when Elijah came to the place where she was.—"And he called unto her, "and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a "vessel, that I may drink. And, as she was going "to fetch it, he called unto her, and said, Bring me, "I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. And "she said, as the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a "cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a lit-"tle oil in a cruse: and behold, I am gathering "two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me "and my son, that we may eat it and die. And Eli-"jah said unto her, Fear not, but go, and do as thou "hast said; but make me thereof a little cake first, "and bring it unto me; and after, make for thee "and for thy son, For thus saith the Lord God of "Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither "shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the "Lord sendeth rain upon the earth."

True charity is always unwilling to find excuses,—else here was a fair opportunity of pleading many: she might have insisted over again upon her situation, which necessarily tied up her hands;—she might have urged the unreasonableness of the request;—that she was reduced to the lowest extremity already, and that it was contrary to justice and the first law of nature, to rob herself and child of their last morsel, and give it to a stranger.

But, in generous spirits, compassion is sometimes more than a balance for self-preservation; for, as God certainly interwove that friendly soft-

ness in our nature to be a check upon too great a propensity towards self-love,—so it seemed to operate here.—For it is observable, that, though the prophet backed his request with the promise of an immediate recompense in multiplying her stock,—yet it is not evident she was influenced at all by that temptation; for, if she had, doubtless it must have wrought such a mixture of self-interest into the motive of her compliance, as must greatly have allayed the merit of the action. But this, I say, does not appear, but rather the contrary, from the reflection she makes upon the whole, in the last verse of the chapter: "Now, by this, I know that "thou art a man of God, and that the word of the "Lord in thy mouth is truth."

Besides, as she was an inhabitant of Zarephath (or, as it is called by St. Luke, Sarepta, subject to Zidon, the metropolis of Phœnicia, without the bounds of God's people) she had been brought up in gross darkness and idolatry, in utter ignorance of the Lord God of Israel: or, if she had heard of his name, which is all that seems probable, she had been taught to disbelieve the mighty wonders of his hand, and was still less likely to believe his prophet.

Moreover, she might argue, If this man, by some secret mystery of his own, or through the power of his God, is able to procure so preternatural a supply for me, whence comes it to pass that he now stands in want himself, oppressed both with hunger and thirst?

It appears, therefore, that she must have been wrought upon by an unmixed principle of humanity.—She looked upon him as a fellow-partner, al-

most in the same affliction with herself;—she considered he had come a weary pilgrimage, in a sultry climate, through an exhausted country, where neither bread nor water were to be had but by acts of liberality;—that he had come an unknown traveller, and, as a hard heart never wants a pretence, that this circumstance, which should rather have befriended, might have helped to oppress him.—She considered, for charity is ever fruitful in kind reasons, that he was now far from his own country, and had strayed out of the reach of the tender offices of some one who affectionately mourned his absence;—her heart was touched with pity;—she turned in silence, and "went and did according as "he had said. And behold, both she, and he, and "her house, did eat many days;" or, as in the margin, one whole year. "And the barrel of meal "wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, until "the day that God sent rain upon the earth."

Though it may not seem necessary to raise conjectures here upon this event, yet it is natural to suppose, the danger of the famine being thus unexpectedly got over, that the mother began to look hopefully forwards upon the rest of her days. There were many widows in Israel at that time, when the heavens were shut up for three years and six months, yet, as St. Luke observes, "to none of "them was the prophet sent, save to the widow of "Sarepta." In all likelihood, she would not be the last in making the same observation, and drawing from it some flattering conclusion in favour of her son.—Many a parent would build high upon a worse foundation.—Since the God of Israel has thus sent his own messenger to us in our distress, to pass

'by so many houses of his own pepole, and stop at 'mine, to save it in so miraculous a manner from 'destruction, doubtless, this is but an earnest of his 'future kind intentions to us: at least his good-'ness has decreed to comfort my old age by the 'long life and health of my son:—but, perhaps, he 'has something greater still in store for him; and 'I shall live to see the same hand hereafter crown 'his head with glory and honour.' We may naturally suppose her innocently carried away with such thoughts, when she is called back by an unexpected distemper, which surprises her son, and, in one moment, brings down all her hopes;—"for his "sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left "in him."——

The expostulations of immoderate grief are seldom just.—For, though Elijah had already preserved her son, as well as herself, from immediate death, and was the last cause to be suspected of so sad an accident, yet the passionate mother, in the first transport, challenges him as the author of her misfortune;—as if he had brought down sorrow upon a house which had so hospitably sheltered him. The prophet was too full of compassion to make reply to so unkind an accusation. He takes the dead child "out of his mother's bosom, and laid him upon "his own bed; and he cried unto the Lord, and "said, O Lord my God, hast thou brought evil upon "the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her "son?"—'Is this the reward of all her charity and 'goodness? Thou hast before this robbed her of 'the dear partner of all her joys and all her cares; 'and now that she is a widow, and has most reason 'to expect thy protection, behold thou hast with-

'drawn her last prop; thou hast taken away her 'child, the only stay she had to rest on.'—"And "Elijah cried unto God, and said, O Lord my God, "I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him "again."

The prayer was urgent, and bespoke the distress of a humane mind deeply suffering in the misfortunes of another;—moreover, his heart was rent with other passions.—He was zealous for the name and honour of his God, and thought not only his omnipotence, but his glorious attribute of mercy, concerned in the event: for O! with what triumph would the prophets of Baal retort his own bitter taunt, and say, "his God was either talking, or he "was pursuing, or was in a journey; or, peradventure, he slept and should have been awaked!"—He was moreover involved in the success of his prayer himself:—honest minds are most hurt by scandal;—and he was afraid lest so foul a one, so unworthy of his character, might arise among the heathen, who would report with pleasure, 'Lo! 'the widow of Zarephath took the messenger of 'the God of Israel under her roof, and kindly entertained him, and see how she is rewarded! 'surely the prophet was ungrateful; he wanted 'power, or, what is worse, he wanted pity.'

Besides all this, he pleaded not only the cause of the widow,—it was the cause of charity itself, which had received a deep wound already, and would suffer still more, should God deny it this testimony of his favour. "So the Lord hearkened unto the "voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came "into him again, and he revived. And Elijah took "the child, and brought him down out of the cham-

"ber into the house, and delivered him unto his "mother; and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth."

It would be a pleasure to a good mind to stop here a moment, and figure to itself the picture of so joyful an event. To behold, on one hand, the raptures of the parent, overcome with surprise and gratitude, and imagine how a sudden stroke of such impetuous joy must operate on a despairing countenance, long accustomed to sadness!—To conceive, on the other side of the *piece*, the holy man approaching with the child in his arms,—full of honest triumph in his looks, but sweetened with all the kind sympathy which a gentle nature could overflow with upon so happy an event! It is a subject one might recommend to the pencil of a great genius, and would even afford matter for description here, but that it would lead us too far from the particular purpose for which I have enlarged upon thus much of the story already; the chief design of which is to illustrate, by a fact, what is evident both in reason and scripture, that a charitable and good action is seldom cast away; but that, even in this life, it is more than probable, that what is so scattered shall be gathered again with increase. "Cast "thy bread upon the waters, and thou shalt find it "after many days. Be as a father unto the father-"less, and instead of an husband unto their mother, "so shalt thou be as a son of the Most High, and "he will love thee more than thy mother doth. Be "mindful of good turns, for thou knowest not what "evil shall come upon the earth; and when thou "fallest, thou shalt find a stay. It shall preserve thee "from all affliction, and fight for thee against thy "enemies better than a mighty shield and a strong "spear."

The great instability of temporal affairs, and constant fluctuation of every thing in this world, afford perpetual occasions of taking refuge in such a security.

What by successive misfortunes,—by failings and cross accidents in trade,—by miscarriage of projects:—what by unsuitable expenses of parents, extravagances of children, and the many other secret ways whereby riches make themselves wings and fly away,—so many surprising revolutions do every day happen in families, that it may not seem strange to say, that the posterity of some of the most liberal contributors here, in the changes which one century may produce, may possibly find shelter under this very plant which now they so kindly water. Nay, so quickly sometimes has the wheel turned round, that many a man may live to enjoy the benefit of that charity which his own piety projected.

But besides this, and exclusive of the right which God's promise gives to protection hereafter, charity and benevolence, in the ordinary chain of effects, have a natural and more immediate tendency in themselves to rescue a man from the accidents of the world, by softening the hearts, and winning every man's wishes to its interest. When a compassionate man falls, who would not pity him? who, that had power to do it, would not befriend and raise him up? or, could the most barbarous temper offer an insult to his distress without pain and reluctance? so that it is almost a wonder that covetousness, even in spite of itself, does not sometimes argue a man into charity, by its own principle of looking forwards, and the firm expectation it would delight in of receiving its own again with usury.—So

evident is it, in the course of God's providence and the natural stream of things, that a good office, one time or other, generally meets with a reward.—— Generally, did I say?—how can it ever fail?—when, besides all this, so large a share of the recompense is so inseparable, even from the action itself. Ask the man who has a tear of tenderness always ready to shed over the unfortunate; who, withal, is ready to distribute and willing to communicate,—ask him, if the best things which wits have said of pleasure, have expressed what he has felt, when, by a seasonable kindness, he has "made the heart of the wid-"ow sing for joy." Mark then the expressions of unutterable pleasure and harmony in his looks, and say, whether Solomon has not fixed the point of true enjoyment in the right place, when he declares, 'that he knew no good there was in any of 'the riches or honours of this world, *but for a man 'to do good with them in his life*.' Nor was it without reason he had made this judgment.—Doubtless, he had found and seen the insufficiency of all sensual pleasures; how unable to furnish either a rational or a lasting scheme of happiness! how soon the best of them vanished! the less exceptionable in vanity, but the guilty both "in vanity and vexation "of spirit." But that this was of so pure and refined a nature, it burned without consuming: it was figuratively "the widow's barrel of meal, which "wasted not,—and cruse of oil, which never fail-"ed."

It is not an easy matter to add weight to the testimony of *the wisest man*, upon the pleasure of doing good; or else the evidence of the philosopher Epicurus is very remarkable,—whose word in this

matter is the more to be trusted, because a professed sensualist; who, amidst all the delicacies and improvements of pleasure which a luxuriant fancy might strike out, still maintained, that the best way of enlarging human happiness was, by a communication of it to others.

And if it is necessary here, or there was time to refine upon this doctrine, one might farther maintain, exclusive of the happiness which the mind itself feels in the exercise of this virtue, that the very body of man is never in a better state than when he is most inclined to do good offices:—that as nothing more contributes to health than a benevolence of temper, so nothing generally was a stronger indication of it.

And what seems to confirm this opinion is, an observation, the truth of which must be submitted to every one's reflection;—namely, That a disinclination and backwardness to do good, is often attended, if not produced, by an indisposition of the animal as well as rational part of us:—so naturally do the soul and body, as in other cases so in this, mutually befriend or prey upon each other. And, indeed, setting aside all abstruser reasoning upon the point, I cannot conceive but that the very *mechanical motions* which maintain life, must be performed with more equal vigour and freedom in that man whom a great and good soul perpetually inclines to show mercy to the miserable, than they can be in a poor, sordid, selfish wretch, whose little contracted heart melts at no man's affliction,—but sits brooding so intently over its own plots and concerns, as to see and feel nothing; and, in truth, enjoy nothing beyond himself: and of whom one may say what that

great master of nature has, speaking of a natural sense of harmony, which I think with more justice may be said of compassion, that the man who had it not,—

> —Was fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils:
> The *motions* of his spirits are dull as night;
> And his affections dark as *Erebus!*
> ——Let no such man be trusted.——

What divines say of the mind, naturalists have observed of the body; that there is no passion so natural to it as love,—which is the principle of doing good; and though instances, like this just mentioned, seem far from being proofs of it, yet it is not to be doubted, but that every hard-hearted man has felt much inward opposition before he could prevail upon himself to do aught to fix and deserve the character: and that what we say of long habits of vice, that they are hard to be subdued, may, with equal truth, be said concerning the natural impressions of benevolence,—That a man must do much violence to himself, and suffer many a painful struggle, before he can tear away so great and noble a part of his nature.—Of this, antiquity has preserved a beautiful instance in an anecdote of Alexander, the tyrant of Pheres, who, though he had so industriously hardened his heart as to seem to take delight in cruelty, insomuch as to murder many of his subjects every day, without cause and without pity, —yet, at the bare representation of a tragedy which related the misfortunes of Hecuba and Andromache, he was so touched with the fictitious distress which the poet had wrought up in it, that he burst out into a flood of tears.—The explication of which incon-

sistency is easy, and casts as great a lustre upon human nature, as the man himself was a disgrace to it. The case seems to have been this :—In *real* life he had been blinded with passions, and thoughtlessly hurried on by interest or resentment ;—but here, there was no room for motives of that kind ; so that his attention being first caught hold of, and all his vices laid asleep,—then *nature* awoke in triumph, and showed how deeply she had sown the seeds of compassion in every man's breast ; when tyrants, with vices the most at enmity with it, were not able entirely to root it out !

But this is painting an amiable virtue, and setting her off with shades that wickedness lends us ; when one might safely trust to the force of her own natural charms, and ask, Whether any thing under heaven, in its own nature, is more lovely and engaging? —To illustrate this the more, let us turn our thoughts within ourselves, and for a moment let any number of us here imagine ourselves at this instant engaged in drawing the most perfect and amiable character, such as, according to our conceptions of the Deity, we should think most acceptable to him, and most likely to be universally admired by all mankind,—I appeal to your own thoughts, whether the first idea which offered itself to most of our imaginations, would not be that of a compassionate benefactor, stretching forth his hands to raise up the helpless orphan ? Whatever other virtues we should give our hero, we should all agree in making him a generous friend, who thought the opportunities of doing good to be the only charm of his prosperity : we should paint him like the psalmist's " river of God" overflowing the thirsty parts of

the earth, that he might enrich them, carrying plenty and gladness along with them. If this was not sufficient, and we were still desirous of adding a farther degree of perfection to so great a character, we should endeavour to think of some one, if human nature could furnish such a pattern, who, if occasion required, was willing to undergo all kinds of affliction,—to sacrifice himself,—to forget his dearest interests, and even lay down his life for the good of mankind!—And here,—O merciful Saviour! how would the bright original of thy unbounded goodness break in upon our hearts! "Thou who becamest poor, that we might be "rich!"—though Lord of all this world, yet "hast "not where to lay thy head!"—and though equal in power and glory to the great God of nature, "yet "madest thyself of no reputation, tookest upon thee "the form of a servant!"—submitting thyself, without opening thy mouth, to all the indignities which a thankless and undiscerning people could offer! and, at length, to accomplish our salvation, "be- "camest obedient unto death," suffering thyself, as on this day,* "to be led like a lamb to the slaugh- "ter!"

The consideration of this stupendous instance of compassion in the Son of God, is the most unanswerable appeal that can be made to the heart of man, for the reasonableness of it in himself:—it is the great argument which the apostles use in almost all their exhortations to good works:—"Beloved, if "Christ so loved us,"—the inference is unavoidable; and gives strength and beauty to every thing else which can be urged upon the subject. And,

* Preached on Good Friday.

therefore, I have reserved it for my last and warmest appeal, with which I would gladly finish this discourse, that at least for their sakes for whom it is preached, we might be left to the full impression of so exalted and so seasonable a motive.—That by reflecting upon the infinite labour of this day's love, in the instance of Christ's death, we may consider what an immense debt we owe to each other; and by calling to mind the amiable pattern of his life, in doing good,—we might learn in what manner we may best discharge it.

And, indeed, of all the methods in which a good mind would be willing to do it, I believe there can be none more beneficial, or comprehensive in its effects, than that for which we are here met together; —the proper education of poor children being the groundwork of almost every other kind of charity, as that which makes every other subsequent act of it answer the pious expectation of the giver.

Without this foundation first laid, how much kindness in the progress of a benevolent man's life is unavoidably cast away! and sometimes where it is as senseless as the exposing a tender plant to all the inclemencies of a cruel season, and then going with sorrow to take it in, when the root is already dead. I said, therefore, this was the foundation of almost every kind of charity;—and might one not have added, of all policy too? since the many ill consequences which attend the want of it, though grievously felt by the parties themselves, are no less so by the community of which they are members; and, moreover, of all mischiefs, seem the hardest to be redressed,—insomuch, that when one considers the disloyal seductions of popery on one hand,—and, on

the other, that no bad man, whatever he professes, can be a good subject, one may venture to say, it had been cheaper and better for the nation to have borne the expense of instilling sound principles and good morals into the neglected children of the lower sort, especially in some parts of Great-Britain, than to be obliged, so often as we have been within this last century, to rise up and arm ourselves against the rebellious effects which the want of them has brought down even to our doors. And, in fact, if we are to trust to antiquity, the truth of which in this case we have no reason to dispute, this matter has been looked upon of such vast importance to the civil happiness and peace of a people, that some commonwealths, the most eminent for political wisdom, have chose to make a publick concern for it; thinking it much safer to be entrusted to the prudence of the magistrate, than to the mistaken tenderness, or natural partiality of the parent.

It was consistent with this, and bespoke a very refined sense of policy in the Lacedæmonians (though by the way, I believe, different from what more modern politicks would have directed in like circumstances) when Antipater demanded of them fifty children, as hostages for the security of a distant engagement, they made this brave and wise answer: 'They would not,—they could not consent: ' —they would rather give him double the number ' of their best grown-up men.'—Intimating, that, however they were distressed, they would choose any inconvenience rather than suffer the loss of their country's education; and the opportunity (which if once lost can never be regained) of giving their youth an early tincture of religion, and

bringing them up to a love of industry, and a love of the laws and constitution of their country. If this shews the great importance of a proper education to children of all ranks and conditions, what shall we say then of those whom the providence of God has placed in the very lowest lot of life, utterly cast out of the *way* of knowledge, without a parent,—sometimes may be without a friend to guide and instruct them, but what common pity and the necessity of their sad situation engage:—where the dangers which surround them on every side are so great and many, that for one fortunate passenger in life, who makes his way well in the world with such early disadvantages, and so dismal a setting out, we may reckon thousands who every day suffer shipwreck, and are lost forever.

If there is a case under heaven which calls out aloud for the more immediate exercise of compassion, and which may be looked upon as the compendium of all charity, surely it is this; and I am persuaded there would want nothing more to convince the greatest enemy to these kinds of charities that it is so, but a bare opportunity of taking a nearer view of some of the more distressful objects of it.

Let him go into the dwellings of the unfortunate; into some mournful cottage, where poverty and affliction reign together. There let him behold the disconsolate widow,—sitting,—steeped in tears;—thus sorrowing over the infant she knows not how to succour:—'O my child! thou art now left exposed to a wide and vitious world, too full of snares and temptations for thy tender and unpractised age!'—Perhaps a parent's love may magnify those dangers:—'but when I consider thou art

'driven out naked into the midst of them, without 'friends, without fortune, without instruction, my 'heart bleeds before-hand for the evils which may 'come upon thee! God, in whom we trusted, is 'witness, so low had his providence placed us, that 'we never indulged one wish to have made thee 'rich:—virtuous we would have made thee;—for 'thy father, *my husband, was a good man, and feared the Lord;*—and though all the fruits of his care 'and industry were little enough for our support, 'yet he honestly had determined to have spared 'some portion of it, scanty as it was, to have placed 'thee safely in the way of knowledge and instruction.—But alas! he is gone from us, never to return more; and with him are fled the means of doing it.—For, *Behold the creditor is come upon us*, 'to take all that we have.'—Grief is eloquent, and will not easily be imitated.—But let the man who is the least friend to distresses of this nature, conceive some disconsolate widow uttering her complaint, even in this manner, and then let him consider, "if "there is any sorrow like *this* sorrow, wherewith the "Lord has afflicted *her?*" or whether there can be any charity like that of taking "the child out of the "mother's bosom," and rescuing her from these apprehensions? Should a heathen, a stranger to our holy religion and the love it teaches, should he, "as he journeyed, come to the place where *she lay*, "when he saw, would he not have compassion on "*her?*" God forbid a christian should *this day* want it! or at any time *look upon* such a distress, "and "pass by on the other side."

Rather, let him do as his Saviour taught him, "bind up the wounds, and pour" comfort into the

heart of one whom the hand of God has so bruised. Let him practise what it is, with Elijah's transport, to say to the afflicted widow,—"See, thy son liveth!" —liveth by my charity, and the bounty of this hour, to all the purposes which make life desirable,—to be made a good man and a profitable subject:—On one hand, to be trained up to such a sense of his duty, as may secure him an interest in the world to come;—and, with regard to this world, to be so brought up in it to a love of honest labour and industry, as all his life long to earn and eat his bread with joy and thankfulness.

'Much peace and happiness rest upon the head 'and heart of every one who thus brings children 'to Christ!—May the blessing of him that was 'ready to perish, come seasonably upon him!—The 'Lord comfort him *when he most wants it!* When 'he lies sick upon his bed, make thou, O God! all 'his bed in his sickness! and for what he now scat-'ters, give him, then, that peace of thine which 'passeth all understanding, and which nothing in 'this world can either give or take away!' Amen.

SERMON VI.

PHARISEE AND PUBLICAN IN THE TEMPLE.

LUKE XVIII. 14. First part.

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other.

THESE words are the judgment which our Saviour has left upon the behaviour and different degrees of merit in the two men, the Pharisee and Publican, whom he represents, in the foregoing parable, as going up into the temple to pray. In what manner they discharged this great and solemn duty, will best be seen from a consideration of the prayer which each is said to have addressed to God upon the occasion.

The Pharisee, instead of an act of humiliation in that awful presence before which he stood,—with an air of triumph and self-sufficiency, thanks God that he had not made him like others;—extortioners, adulterers, unjust, or even as this publican.—The publican is represented as standing afar off, and with a heart touched with humility from a just sense of his own unworthiness, is said only to have smote upon his breast, saying,—God be merciful to me a sinner!—I tell you, adds our Saviour, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.

Though the justice of this determination strikes every one at first sight, it may not be amiss to enter

into a more particular examination of the evidence and reasons upon which it might be founded, not only because it may place the equity of this derision in favour of the publican in a stronger light,—but that the subject seems likely to lead me to a train of reflections not unsuitable to the solemnity of the season.*

The pharisee was one of that sect, who, in our Saviour's time, what by the austerity of their lives,—their public alms-deeds,—and greater pretences to piety than other men, had gradually wrought themselves into much credit and reputation with the people: and, indeed, as the bulk of these are easily caught with appearances, their character seems to have been admirably well suited to such a purpose.—If you looked no farther than the outward part of it, you would think it made up of all goodness and perfection; an uncommon sanctity of life, guarded by great decorum and severity of manners,—profuse and frequent charities to the poor,—many acts of religion,—much observance of the law,—much abstinence,—much prayer.

It is painful to suspect the appearance of so much good;—and would have been so here, had not our blessed Saviour left us their real character upon record, and drawn up by himself in one word,—That the sect were like whitened sepulchres, all fair and beautiful without, and enriched there with whatever could attract the eye of the beholder; but, when searched within-side, were full of corruption, and of whatever could shock and disgust the searcher. So that, with all their affectation of piety, and more extraordinary strictness and regularity in their out-

* Preached in Lent.

ward deportment, all was irregular and uncultivated within ;—and all these fair pretences, how promising soever, blasted by the indulgence of the worst of human passions,—pride,—spiritual pride (the worst of all pride)—hypocrisy, self-love, covetousness, extortion, cruelty, and revenge. What pity it is that the sacred name of religion should ever have been borrowed, and employed in so bad a work as in covering over such a black catalogue of vices ! or that the fair form of virtue should have been thus disgraced and forever drawn into suspicion, from the unworthy uses of this kind to which the artful and abandoned have often put her ! The pharisee seems to have had not many scruples of this kind ; and the prayer he makes use of in the temple is a true picture of the man's heart, and shews with what a disposition and frame of mind he came to worship.

God ! I thank thee that thou hast formed me of different materials from the rest of my species, whom thou hast created frail and vain by nature, but by choice and disposition utterly corrupt and wicked !

Me, thou hast fashioned in a different mould, and hast infused so large a portion of thy spirit into me, lo ! I am raised above the temptations and desires to which flesh and blood are subject !—I thank thee that thou hast made me thus :—not a frail vessel of clay, like that of other men,—or even this publican, but that I stand here a chosen and sanctified vessel unto thee !

After this obvious paraphrase upon the words, which speaks no more than the true spirit of the pharisee's prayer,—you would naturally ask, What reason was there for all this triumph ?—or what

foundation could he have to insult in this manner over the infirmities of mankind ?—or even those of the humble publican who stood before him ?—Why, says he, I fast twice in the week ; I give tythes of all that I possess.—Truly, a very indifferent account of himself ;—and if that was all he had to offer in his own behalf, God knows, it was but a weak foundation to support so much arrogance and self-conceit ; because the observance of both the one and the other of these ordinances, might be supposed well enough to be consistent with the most profligate of life and manners.

The conduct and behaviour of the publican appear very different ;—and, indeed, as much the reverse to this as you could conceive. But before we enter upon that, as I have spoken largely to the character of the pharisee, 'twill be but justice to say a word or two in general to his.—The publican was one of that order of men employed by the Roman emperors in levying the taxes and contributions which were from time to time exacted from Judea as a conquered nation. Whether from the particular fate of that employment, owing to the fixed aversion which men have to part with what is their own, or from whatever other causes it happened,—so it was, that the whole set of men were odious ; insomuch, that the name of a publican was a term of reproach and infamy amongst the Jews.

Perhaps the many instances of rigour to which their office might direct them,—heightened sometimes by a mixture of cruelty and insolence of their own,—and possibly always made to appear worse than they were by the loud clamours and misrepresentations of others,—all might have contributed to

form and fix this odium. But it was here, no doubt, as in all other classes of men whose professions expose them to more temptations than that of others, —that there are numbers who still behave well, and who, amidst all the snares and opportunities which lie in their way,—pass through them, not only with an unblemished character, but with the inward testimony of a good conscience.

The publican, in all likelihood, was one of these; —and the sentiments of candour and humility which the view of his condition inspired, are such as could come only from a heart and character thus described.

He goes up into the temple to pay his sacrifice of prayer;—in the discharge of which, he pleads no merit of his own,—enters into no comparison with others,—or justification of himself with God, but, in reverence to that holier part of the temple where his presence was supposed more immediately to be displayed,—he keeps afar off,—is afraid to lift up his eyes towards heaven;—but smites upon his breast, and in a short but fervent ejaculation,—submissively begs God to have mercy upon his sins.—O God! how precious, how amiable is true humility!—what a difference in thy sight does it make to consist betwixt man and man! Pride was not made for a creature with such manifold imperfections:—religious pride is a dress which still worse becomes him;—because, of all others, 'tis that to which he has the least pretence:—the best of us fall seven times a day, and thereby add some degree of unprofitableness to the character of those who do all that is commanded them.—Was I perfect therefore, says Job, I would not know my soul, I would be silent, I would be ignorant of my own righteousness;

for, should I say I was perfect, it would prove me to be perverse. From this introduction I will take occasion to recommend this virtue of religious humility, which so naturally falls from the subject, and which cannot more effectually be enforced, than by an inquiry into the chief causes which produce the opposite vice to it,—that of spiritual pride;—for in this malady of the mind of man,—the case is parallel with most others of his body, the dangers of which can never rightly be apprehended; nor can remedies be applied either with judgment or success, till they are traced back to their first principles, and the seeds of the disorder are laid open and considered.

And first, I believe, one of the most general causes of spiritual pride, is that which seems to have misled the pharisee:—a mistaken notion of the true principles of his religion. He thought, no doubt, that the whole of it was comprehended in the two articles of paying tythes and frequent fasting; and that when he had discharged his conscience of them,—he had done all that was required at his hands, and might with reason go, and thank God that he had not made him like others.—It is not to be questioned, but through force of this error, the pharisee might think himself to be, what he pretended, a religious and upright man.—For however he might be brought to act a double and insincere part in the eyes of men upon worldly views,—it is not to be supposed—that when he stood by himself, apart in the temple, and no witnesses of what passed between him and his God,—that he should knowingly and wilfully have dared to act so open and barefaced a scene of mockery in the face of heaven.

This is scarce probable;—and therefore must have been owing to some delusion in his education, which had early implanted in his mind false and wretched notions of the essentials of religion,—which, as he grew up, had proved the seeds of infinite error, both in practice and speculation.

With the rest of his sect, he had been so principled and instructed as to observe a scrupulous nicety and most religious exactness in the lesser matters of his religion,—its frequent washings,—its fastings and other external rites, of no merit in themselves,—but to stand exempted from the more troublesome exactness in the weightier matters of the law, which were of eternal and unchangeable obligation. So that they were in truth blind guides, —who thus will strain at a gnat and yet swallow a camel; and, as our Saviour reproves them from a familiar instance of domestick inconsistency,—would make clean outside of the cup and platter,—yet suffer the inside,—the most material part,—to be full of corruption and excess. From this knowledge of the character and principles of the pharisee, 'tis easy to account for his sentiments and behaviour in the temple, which were just such as they would have led one to have expected.

Thus it has always happened, by a fatality common to all such abuses of religion, as make it to consist in external rites and ceremonies, more than inward purity and integrity of heart.—As these outward things are easily put in practice, and capable of being attained to without much capacity, or much opposition to flesh and blood,—it too naturally betrays the professors of it into a groundless persuasion of their own godliness, and a despicable one of

that of others, in their religious capacities, and the relations in which they stand towards God: which is the very definition of spiritual pride.

When the true heat and spirit of devotion is thus lost and extinguished under a cloud of ostentatious ceremonies and gestures, as is remarkable in the Roman church,—where the celebration of high mass, when set off to the best advantage with all its scenical decorations and finery, looks more like a theatrical performance than that humble and solemn appeal which dust and ashes are offering up to the throne of God;—when religion, I say, is thus clogged and borne down by such a weight of ceremonies,—it is much easier to put in pretensions to holiness upon such a mechanical system as is left of it, than where the character is only to be got and maintained by a painful conflict and perpetual war against the passions. 'Tis easier, for instance, for a zealous papist to cross himself and tell his beads, than for an humble protestant to subdue the lusts of anger, intemperance, cruelty, and revenge, to appear before his Maker with that preparation of mind which becomes him. The operation of being sprinkled with holy water, is not so difficult in itself as that of being chaste and spotless within,—conscious of no dirty thought or dishonest action. 'Tis a much shorter way to kneel down at a confessional and receive absolution,—than to live so to deserve it,—not at the hands of men,—but at the hands of God,—who sees the heart, and cannot be imposed upon.—The achievement of keeping Lent, or abstaining from flesh on certain days, is not so hard as that of abstaining from the works of it at all times;—especially, as the point is generally man-

aged amongst the richer sort with such art and epicurism at their tables,—and with such indulgence to a poor mortified appetite,—that an entertainment upon a fast is much more likely to produce a *surfeit* than a fit of sorrow.

One might run the parallel much farther, but this may be sufficient to shew how dangerous and delusive these mistakes are;—how apt to mislead and overset weak minds, which are ever apt to be caught by the pomp of such external parts of religion. This is so evident, that even in our own church, where there is the greatest chastity in things of this nature,—and of which none are retained in our worship but what, I believe, tend to excite and assist it,—yet, so strong a propensity is there in our nature to sense,—and so unequal a match is the understanding of the bulk of mankind for the impressions of outward things,—that we see thousands who every day mistake the shadow for the substance; and, was it fairly put to the trial, would exchange the reality for the appearance.

You see this was almost universally the case of the Jewish church;—where, for want of proper guard and distinction betwixt the means of religion and religion itself, the ceremonial part in time eat away the moral part, and left nothing but a shadow behind.—'Tis to be feared the buffooneries of the Romish church bid fair to do it the same ill office, to the disgrace and utter ruin of christianity, wherever popery is established. What then remains, but that we rectify these gross and pernicious notions of religion, and place it upon its true bottom, which we can only do by bringing back religion to that cool point of reason which first shewed us its obli-

gation,—by always remembering that God is a Spirit,—and must be worshipped suitable to his nature, *i. e.* in spirit and in truth;—and that the most acceptable sacrifice we can offer him, is a virtuous and an upright mind;—and however necessary it is, not to leave the ceremonial and positive parts of religion undone,—yet, not like the pharisee, to rest there,—and omit the weightier matters, but keep this in view perpetually, that though the instrumental duties of religion are duties of unquestionable obligation to us,—yet they are still but instrumental duties, conducive to the great end of all religion, —which is to purify our hearts—and conquer our passions;—and, in a word, to make us wiser and better men,—better neighbours,—better citizens,—and better servants to God.

To whom, &c.

SERMON VII.

VINDICATION OF HUMAN NATURE.

ROMANS XIV. 7.

For none of us liveth to himself.

There is not a sentence in scripture which strikes a narrow soul with greater astonishment;—and one might as easily engage to clear up the darkest problem in geometry to an ignorant mind, as make a sordid one comprehend the truth and reasonableness of this plain proposition,—No man liveth to himself!—Why?—Does any man live to any thing else?—In the whole compass of human life, can a prudent man steer to a safer point?—Not live to himself!—To whom then?—Can any interests or concerns which are foreign to a man's self have such a claim over him, that he must serve under them,—suspend his own pursuits,—step out of his right course till others have passed by him, and attained the several ends and purposes of living before him?

If, with a selfish heart, such an inquirer should happen to have a speculating head too, he will proceed, and ask you, whether this same principle which the apostle here throws out of the life of man, is not in fact the grand bias of his nature?—That however we may flatter ourselves with fine-spun notions of disinterestedness and heroism in what we do; were the most popular of our actions stripped

naked, and the true motives and intentions of them searched to the bottom, we should find little reason for triumph upon that score.——

In a word, he will say, that a man is altogether a bubble to himself in this matter, and that after all that can be said in his behalf, the truest definition that can be given of him is this, that he is a selfish animal; and that all his actions have so strong a tincture of that character, as to shew, to whomever else he was intended to live, that in fact he lives only to himself.

Before I reply directly to this accusation, I cannot help observing by the way, that there is scarce any thing which has done more disservice to social virtue than the frequent representations of human nature under this hideous picture of deformity, which, by leaving out all that is generous and friendly in the heart of man, has sunk him below the level of a brute, as if he was a composition of all that was mean-spirited and selfish. Surely, 'tis one step towards acting well, to think worthily of our nature; and, as in common life the way to make a man honest, is to suppose him so, and treat him as such,—so here, to set some value upon ourselves, enables us to support the character, and even inspires and adds sentiments of generosity and virtue to those which we have already preconceived. The scripture tells, That God made man in his own image,—not surely in the sensitive and corporeal part of him: that could bear no resemblance with a pure and infinite Spirit;—but what resemblance he bore was undoubtedly in the moral rectitude, and the kind and benevolent affections of his nature. And though the brightness of his image has been sullied greatly

by the fall of man in our first parents, and the characters of it rendered still less legible by the many superinductions of his own depraved appetites since, —yet 'tis a laudable pride and a true greatness of mind to cherish a belief, that there is so much of that glorious image still left upon it, as shall restrain him from base and disgraceful actions; to answer which end, what thought can be more conducive than that of our being made in the likeness of the greatest and best of Beings? This is a plain consequence. And the consideration of it should have in some measure been a protection to human nature, from the rough usage she has met with from the satirical pens of so many of the French writers, as well as of our own country, who with more wit than well-meaning, have desperately fallen foul upon the whole species, as a set of creatures incapable either of private friendship or publick spirit, but just as the case suited their own interest and advantage.

That there is selfishness and meanness enough in the souls of one part of the world, to hurt the credit of the other part of it, is what I shall not dispute against; but to judge of the whole from this bad sample, and because one man is plotting and artful in his nature;—or, a second openly makes his pleasure or his profit the whole centre of all his designs; —or because a third strait-hearted wretch sits confined within himself,—feels no misfortunes but those which touch himself;—to involve the whole race without mercy under such detested characters, is a conclusion as false as it is pernicious; and was it in general to gain credit, could serve no end, but the rooting out of our nature all that is generous, and

planting in the stead of it such an aversion to each other, as must untie the bands of society, and rob us of one of the greatest pleasures of it, the mutual communications of kind offices; and by poisoning the fountain, render every thing suspected that flows through it.

To the honour of human nature, the scripture teaches us, that God made man upright;—and though he has since found out many inventions, which have much dishonoured this noble structure yet the foundation of it stands as it was,—the whole frame and design of it carried on upon social virtue and publick spirit, and every member of us so evidently supported by this strong cement, that we may say with the apostle, that no man liveth to himself. In whatsoever light we view him, we shall see evidently that there is no station or condition of his life,—no office or relation, or circumstance, but there arise from it so many ties, so many indispensable claims upon him, as must perpetually carry him beyond any selfish consideration, and shew plainly, that was a man foolishly wicked enough to design to live to himself alone, he would either find it impracticable, or he would lose, at least, the very thing which made life itself desirable. We know that our Creator, like an ill-wise contriver, in this, as in all other of his works, has implanted in mankind such appetites and inclinations as were suitable for their state; that is, such as would naturally lead him to the love of society and friendship, without which he would have been found in a worse condition than the very beasts of the field. No one, therefore, who lives in society, can be said to live to himself;—he lives to his God,—to his king, and his

country ;—he lives to his family, to his friends, to all under his trust, and, in a word, he lives to the whole race of mankind :—whatsoever has the character of man, and wears the same image of God that he does, is truly his brother, and has a just claim to his kindness.—That this is the case in fact, as well as in theory, may be made plain to any one who has made any observations upon human life.—When we have traced it through all its connections,—viewed it under the several obligations which succeed each other in a perpetual rotation through the different stages of a hasty pilgrimage, we shall find that these do operate so strongly upon it, and lay us justly under so many restraints, that we are every hour sacrificing something to society, in return for the benefits we receive from it.

To illustrate this, let us take a short survey of the life of any one man, not liable to great exceptions, but such a life as is common to most ; let us examine it merely to this point, and try how far it will answer such a representation.

If we begin with him in that early age wherein the strongest marks of undisguised tenderness and disinterested compassion shew themselves,—I might previously observe, with what impressions he is come out of the hands of God, with the very bias upon his nature which prepares him for the character which he was designed to fulfil. But let us pass by the years which denote childhood, as no lawful evidence, you'll say, in this dispute ; let us follow him to the period when he is just got loose from tutors and governors, when his actions may be argued upon with less exception : if you observe, you will find that one of the first and leading propensi-

ties of his nature is, that which discovers itself in the desire of society, and the spontaneous love towards those of his kind :—and though the natural wants and exigencies of his condition are, no doubt, one reason of this amiable impulse,—God having founded that in him as a provisional security to make him social,—yet, though it is a reason in nature,—'tis a reason to him yet undiscovered. Youth is not apt to philosophize so deeply,—but follows,—as it feels itself prompted by the inward workings of benevolence,—without view to itself, or previous calculation either of the loss or profit which may accrue. Agreeably to this, observe how warmly, how heartily he enters into friendships,—how disinterested, and unsuspicious in the choice of them !—how generous and open in his professions !—how sincere and honest in making them good !—When his friend is in distress,—what lengths he will go ! —what hazards he will bring upon himself !—what embarrassment upon his affairs, to extricate and serve him ! If man is altogether a selfish creature, as these moralizers would make him, 'tis certain he does not arrive at the full maturity of it in this time of his life.—No. If he deserves any accusation, 'tis in the other extreme, "that in his youth he is generally more fool than knave ;"—and so far from being suspected of living to himself, that he lives rather to every body else ; the unconsciousness of art and design, in his own intentions, rendering him so utterly void of a suspicion of it in others, as to leave him too oft a bubble to every one who will take the advantage.—But you'll say, he soon abates of these transports of disinterested love ; and as he grows

older,—grows wiser, and learns to live more to himself.

Let us examine.——

That a longer knowledge of the world, and some experience of insincerity,—will teach him a lesson of more caution in the choice of friendships, and less forwardness in the undistinguished offers of his services, is what I grant. But if he cools of these, does he not grow warmer still in connections of a different kind? Follow him, I pray you, into the next stage of life, where he has entered into engagements, and appears as the father of a family, and you will see the passion still remains,—the stream somewhat more confined,—but runs the stronger for it:—the same benevolence of heart altered only in its course, and the difference of objects towards which it tends. Take a short view of him in this light, as acting under the many tender claims which that relation lays upon him,—spending many weary days and sleepless nights,—utterly forgetful of himself, intent only upon his family, and with an anxious heart contriving and labouring to preserve it from distress, against that hour when he shall be taken from its protection. Does such a one live to himself?—He who rises early, late takes rest, and eats the bread of carefulness, to save others the sorrow of doing so after him? Does such a one live only to himself?—Ye, who are parents, answer this question for him. How oft have ye sacrificed your health,—your ease,—your pleasures,—nay, the very comforts of your lives, for the sake of your children!—How many indulgences have ye given up!—What self-denials and difficulties have ye cheerfully undergone for them!—In their sickness, or re-

ports of their misconduct, how have ye gone on your way sorrowing! What alarms within you, when fancy forebodes but imaginary misfortunes hanging over them!—but when real ones have overtaken them, and mischief befallen them in the way in which they have gone, how sharper than a sword have ye felt the workings of parental kindness! In whatever period of human life we look for proofs of selfishness,—let us not seek them in this relation of a parent, whose whole life, when truly known, is often little else but a succession of cares, heart-aches, and disquieting apprehensions,—enough to shew that he is but an instrument in the hands of God to provide for the well-being of others, to serve their interest as well as his own.

If you try the truth of this reasoning upon every other part or situation of the same life, you will find it holds good in one degree or other. Take a view of it out of these closer connections, both of a friend and parent;—consider him for a moment under that natural alliance in which even a heathen poet has placed him; namely, that of a man;—and as such, to his honour, as one incapable of standing unconcerned in whatever concerns his fellow-creatures. —Compassion has so great a share in our nature, and the miseries of this world are so constant an exercise of it, as to leave it in no one's power, who deserves the name of man, in this respect,—to live to himself.

He cannot stop his ears against the cries of the unfortunate.—The sad story of the fatherless, and him that has no helper, must be heard.—"The sor-"rowful sighing of the prisoner will come before "him;" and a thousand other untold cases of dis-

tress to which the life of man is subject, find a way to his heart, let interest guide the passage as it will. —'If he has this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, he will not be able to shut up his 'bowels of compassion from him.'

Let any man of common humanity look back upon his own life as subjected to these strong claims, and recollect the influence they have had upon him. How oft the mere impulses of generosity and compassion have led him out of his way!—In how many acts of charity and kindness his fellow-feeling for others has made him forget himself!—In neighbourly offices, how oft he has acted against all considerations of profits, convenience, nay sometimes even of justice itself!—Let him add to this account, how much, in the progress of his life, has been given up even to the lesser obligations of civility and good manners!—What restraints they have laid him under!—How large a portion of his time,—how much of his inclination and the plan of life he should most have wished, has from time to time been made a sacrifice to his good-nature, and disinclination to give pain or disgust to others!

Whoever takes a view of the life of man in this glass wherein I have shewn it, will find it so beset and hemmed in with obligations of one kind or other, as to leave little room to suspect that man can live to himself: and so closely has our Creator linked us together, as well as all other parts of his works, for the preservation of that harmony in the frame and system of things which his wisdom has at first established,—that we find this bond of mutual dependence, however relaxed, is too strong to be broke: and I believe, that the most selfish men find

it is so, and that they cannot, in fact, live so much to themselves as the narrowness of their own hearts inclines them. If these reflections are just upon the moral relations in which we stand to each other, let us close the examination with a short reflection upon the great relation in which we stand to God.

The first and more natural thought on this subject, which at one time or other will thrust itself upon every man's mind, is this,—That there is a God who made me,—to whose gift I owe all the powers and faculties of my soul, to whose providence I owe all the blessings of my life, and by whose permission it is that I exercise and enjoy them; that I am placed in this world as a creature of but a day, hastening to the place from whence I shall not return: —that I am accountable for my conduct and behaviour to this great and wisest of Beings, before whose judgment-seat I must finally appear and receive the things done in my body,—whether they are good or whether they are bad.

Can any one doubt but the most inconsiderate of men sometimes sit down coolly, and make some such plain reflections as these upon their state and condition?—or, that after they have made them, can one imagine they lose all effect?—As little appearance as there is of religion in the world, there is a great deal of its influence felt in its affairs;—nor can one so root out the principles of it, but like nature they will return again, and give checks and interruptions to guilty pursuits. There are seasons when the thoughts of a just God overlooking, and the terror of an after-reckoning, have made the most determined tremble, and stop short in the execution of a wicked purpose; and if we conceive that the

worst of men lay some restraint upon themselves from the weight of this principle, what shall we think of the good and virtuous part of the world, who live under the perpetual influence of it,—who sacrifice their appetites and passions from a consciousness of their duty to God; and consider him as the object to whom they have dedicated their service, and make that the first principle and ultimate end of all their actions?—How many real and unaffected instances there are in the world of men thus governed, will not concern us so much to enquire, as to take care that we are of the number: which may God grant, for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.

SERMON VIII.

TIME AND CHANCE.

ECCLES. IX. 11.

I returned and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, —nor the battle to the strong,—neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill,—but time and chance happeneth to them all.

When a man casts a look upon this melancholy description of the world, and sees, contrary to all his guesses and expectations, what different fates attend the lives of men,—how oft it happens in the world that there is not even bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, &c.—he is apt to conclude, with a sigh upon it,—in the words, though not in the sense of the wise man, That time and chance happeneth to them all.—That time and chance,—apt seasons and fit conjunctures, have the greatest sway in the turns and disposals of men's fortunes;—and that, as these lucky hits (as they are called) happen to be for or against a man,—they either open the way to his advancement against all obstacles,—or block it up against all helps and attempts. That, as the text intimates, neither *wisdom*, nor *understanding*, nor *skill*, shall be able to surmount them.

However widely we may differ in our reasonings upon this observation of Solomon's, the authority of the observation is strong beyond doubt, and the evidence given of it in all ages so alternately confirm-

ed by examples and complaints, as to leave the fact itself unquestionable.—That things are carried on in this world sometimes so contrary to all our reasonings, and the seeming probabilities of success,—that even the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong;—nay, what is stranger still,—nor yet bread to the wise, who should last stand in want of it;—nor yet riches to men of understanding, who you would think best qualified to acquire them;—nor yet favour to men of skill, whose merit and pretences bid the fairest for it;—but that there are some secret and unseen workings in human affairs, which baffle all our endeavours,—and turn aside the course of things in such a manner,—that the most likely causes disappoint and fail of producing for us the effect which we wished and naturally expected from them.

You will see a man, of whom was you to form a conjecture from the appearance of things in his favour,—you would say was setting out in the world with the fairest prospect of making his fortune in it;—with all the advantages of birth to recommend him,—of personal merit to speak for him,—and of friends to help and push him forwards: you will behold him, notwithstanding this, disappointed in every effect you might naturally have looked for from them! every step he takes towards his advancement, something invisible shall pull him back, some unforeseen obstacle shall rise up perpetually in his way, and keep him there.—In every application he makes,—some untoward circumstance shall blast it.—He shall rise early,—late take rest,—and eat the bread of carefulness,—yet some happier man shall still rise up, and ever step in before him, and leave

him struggling, to the end of his life, in the very same place in which he first began it.

The history of a second shall, in all respects, be the contrast to this. He shall come into the world with the most unpromising appearance,—shall set forwards without fortune, without friends,—without talents to procure him either the one or the other; —nevertheless, you will see this clouded prospect brighten up insensibly, unaccountably before him; every thing presented in his way shall turn out beyond his expectations:—in spite of that chain of unsurmountable difficulties which first threatened him, —time and chance shall open him a way;—a series of successful occurrences shall lead him by the hand to the summit of honour and fortune, and, in a word, without giving him the pains of thinking, or the credit of projecting it, shall place him in safe possession of all that ambition could wish for.

The histories of the lives and fortunes of men are full of instances of this nature,—where favourable times and lucky accidents have done for them what wisdom or skill could not: and there is scarce any one who has lived long in the world, who, upon looking backwards, will not discover such a mixture of these in the many successful turns which have happened in this life, as to leave him very little reason to dispute against the fact, and, I should hope, as little upon the conclusions to be drawn from it.

Some, indeed, from a superficial view of this representation of things, have atheistically inferred,— that because there was so much of lottery in this life,—and mere casualty seemed to have such a share in the disposal of our affairs,—that the providence of God stood neuter and unconcerned in their

several workings, leaving them to the mercy of time and chance to be furthered or disappointed as such blind agents directed;—whereas, in truth, the very opposite conclusion follows: for, consider,—if a superior intelligent Power did not sometimes cross and over-rule events in this world,—then our policies and designs in it would always answer according to the wisdom and stratagem in which they were laid, and every cause, in the course of things, would produce its natural effect without variation. Now, as this is not the case, it necessarily follows, from Solomon's reasoning, that, if the race is not to the swift, if knowledge and learning do not always secure men from want,—nor care and industry always make men rich,—nor art and skill infallibly make men high in the world, that there is some other cause which mingles itself in human affairs, and governs and turns them as it pleases; which cause can be no other than the First Cause of all things, and the secret and over-ruling providence of that Almighty God, who, though his dwelling is so high, yet he humbleth himself to behold the things that are done on earth, raising up the poor out of the dust, and lifting the beggar from the dung-hill; and, contrary to all hopes, putting him with princes, even with the princes of his people; which, by the way, was the case of David, who makes the acknowledgment!—And, no doubt,—one reason why God has selected to his own disposal so many instances as this, where events have run counter to all probabilities,—was to give testimony to his providence in governing the world, and to engage us to a consideration and dependence upon

it, for the event and success of our undertakings.* For undoubtedly,—as I said, it should seem but suitable to nature's laws, that the race should ever be to the swift,—and the battle to the strong;—it is reasonable that the best contrivances and means should have best success;—and since it often falls out otherwise in the case of man, where the wisest projects are overthrown,—and the most hopeful means are blasted, and time and chance happen to all,—you must call on the Deity to untie this knot:—for though at sundry times,—sundry events fall out,— which we, who look no farther than the events themselves, call chance, because they fall out quite contrary both to our intentions and our hopes,—yet at the same time, in respect of God's providence over-ruling in these events, it were profane to call them chance, for they are pure designation; and though invisible, are still the regular dispensations of the superintending power of that Almighty Being from whom all the laws and powers of nature are derived; who, as he has appointed,—so holds them as instruments in his hand, and, without invading the liberty and free-will of his creatures, can turn the passions and desires of their hearts to fulfil his own righteousness, and work such effects in human affairs, which to us seem merely *casual*,—but to him certain and determined; and what his infinite wisdom sees necessary to be brought about for the government and preservation of the world, over which providence perpetually presides.

When the sons of Jacob had cast their brother Joseph into the pit for his destruction,—one would think, if ever any incident which concerned the life

* *Vide* Tillotson's Sermon on this subject.

of man deserved to be called chance, it was this.—That the company of the Ishmaelites should happen to pass by, in that open country, at that very place, at that time too, when this barbarity was committed. After he was rescued by so favourable a contingency,—his life and future fortune still depended upon a series of contingencies equally improbable; for instance, had the business of the Ishmaelites who bought him, carried them from Gilead to any other part of the world besides Egypt; or, when they arrived there, had they sold their bond-slave to any other man but Potiphar, throughout the whole empire;—or, after that disposal, had the unjust accusations of his master's wife cast the youth into any other dungeon than that where the king's prisoners were kept;—or had it fallen out at any other crisis than when Pharaoh's chief butler was cast there too,—had this, or any other of these events fallen out otherwise than it did,—a series of unmerited misfortunes had overwhelmed him,—and in consequence, the whole land of Egypt and Canaan. From the first opening to the conclusion of this long and interesting transaction, the providence of God suffered every thing to take its course:—the malice and cruelty of Joseph's brethren wrought their worst mischief against him; banished him from his country and the protection of his parent.—The lust and baseness of a disappointed woman sunk him still deeper;—loaded his character with an unjust reproach;—and, to complete his ruin, doomed him, friendless, to the miseries of a hopeless prison, where he lay neglected. Providence, though it did not cross these events,—yet Providence bent them to the most merciful ends. When the whole *drama*

was opened, then the wisdom and contrivance of every part of it was displayed. Then it appeared, it was not they (as the patriarch inferred in consolation of his brethren) it was not they that sold him, but God ;—'twas he sent him thither before them ; —his superintending power availed itself of their passions,—directed the operations of them, held the chain in his hand, and turned and wound it to his own purpose. " Ye verily thought evil against me, " —but God meant it for good ;"—' ye had the guilt ' of a bad intention,—his providence the glory of ' accomplishing a good one,—by preserving you a ' posterity upon the earth, and bringing to pass as ' it is this day, to save much people alive.'—All history is full of such testimonies ; which, though they may convince those who look no deeper than the surface of things, that time and chance happen to all,—yet to those who look deeper, they manifest at the same time, that there is a hand much busier in human affairs than what we vainly calculate ; which though the projectors of this world overlook,—or at least make no allowance for in the formation of their plans, they generally find in the execution of them. And though the fatalist may urge, that every event in this life is brought about by the ministry and chain of natural causes,—yet, in answer, let him go one step higher,—and consider,—whose power it is that enables these causes to work ;—whose knowledge it is that foresees what will be their effects ;—whose goodness it is that is invisibly conducting them forwards to the best and greatest ends, for the happiness of his creatures.

So that, as a great reasoner justly distinguishes upon this point,—' It is not only religiously speak-

'ing, but, with the strictest and most philosophical 'truth of expression, that the scripture tells us, 'that *God commandeth* the ravens;—that they are 'his directions which *the winds and the seas obey*. If 'his servant hides himself by the brook, such an or- 'der of causes and effects shall be laid,—that the 'fowls of the air shall minister to his support. 'When this resource fails, and his prophet is di- 'rected to go to Zarephath,—for that he has *com- 'manded* a widow woman there to sustain him,— 'the same hand which leads the prophet to the gate 'of the city,—shall lead forth the distressed widow 'to the same place, to take him under her roof; 'and though, upon the impulse of a different occa- 'sion, shall nevertheless be made to fulfil his pro- 'mise and intention of their mutual preservation.'

Thus much for the truth and illustration of this great and fundamental doctrine of a Providence; the belief of which is of such consequence to us, as to be the great support and comfort of our lives.

Justly, therefore, might the Psalmist upon this declaration, that the Lord is King,—conclude, That the earth may be glad therefore; yea, the multitude of the isles may be glad thereof.

May God grant the persuasion may make us as virtuous as it has reason to make us joyful! and that it may bring forth in us the fruits of good living, to his praise and glory!—to whom be all might, majesty, and dominion, now and forevermore! Amen.

SERMON IX.

THE CHARACTER OF HEROD.*

MAT. II. 17, 18.

Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying,—In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning; Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

THE words which St. Matthew cites here as fulfilled by the cruelty and ambition of Herod,—are in the 31st chapter of Jeremiah, the 15th verse. In the foregoing chapter, the prophet having declared God's intention of turning the mourning of his people into joy, by the restoration of the tribes which had been led away captive into Babylon,—he proceeds, in the beginning of this chapter, which contains this prophecy, to give a more particular description of the great joy and festivity of that promised day, when they were to return once more to their own land, to enter upon their antient possessions, and enjoy again all the privileges they had lost; and, amongst others, and what was above them all,—the favour and protection of God, and the continuation of his mercies to them and their posterity.

To make, therefore, the impression of this change the stronger upon their minds,—he gives a very pathetick representation of the preceding sorrow on that day when they were first led away captive.

* Preached on Innocents Day.

Thus saith the Lord, a voice was heard in Rama; lamentation and bitter weeping: Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they were not.

To enter into the full sense and beauty of this description, it is to be remembered that the tomb of Rachel, Jacob's beloved wife, as we read in the 35th of Genesis, was situated near Rama, and betwixt that place and Bethlehem. Upon which circumstance the prophet raises one of the most affecting scenes that could be conceived; for as the tribes in their sorrowful journey betwixt Rama and Bethlehem, in their way to Babylon, were supposed to pass by this monumental pillar of their ancestor Rachel, Jacob's wife, the prophet, by a common liberty in rhetorick, introduces her as rising up out of her sepulchre, and as the common mother of two of their tribes, weeping for her children, bewailing the sad catastrophe of her posterity led away into a strange land,—refusing to be comforted, because they were not;—lost and cut off from their country, and, in all likelihood, never to be restored back to her again.

The Jewish interpreters say upon this, that the patriarch Jacob buried Rachel in this very place, foreseeing by the spirit of prophecy, that his posterity should that way be led captive, that she might, as they passed her, intercede for them.

But this fanciful superstructure upon the passage, seems to be little else than a mere dream of some of the Jewish doctors; and indeed had they not dreamt it when they did, 'tis great odds, but some of the Romish dreamers would have hit upon it before now. For as it favours the doctrine of inter-

cessions,—if there had not been undeniable vouchers for the real inventors of the conceit, one should much sooner have sought for it among the oral traditions of this church, than in the Talmud,—where it is.

But this by the bye. There is still another interpretation of the words here cited by St. Matthew, which altogether excludes this scenical representation I have given of them.—By which 'tis thought that the lamentation of Rachel here described, has no immediate reference to Rachel, Jacob's wife, but that it simply alludes to the sorrows of her descendants, the distressed mothers of the tribes of Benjamin and Ephraim, who might accompany their children led into captivity as far as Rama, in their way to Babylon, who wept and wailed upon this sad occasion, and, as the prophet describes them in the person of Rachel, refusing to be comforted for the loss of her children; looking upon their departure without hope or prospect of ever beholding a return.

Whichever of the two senses you give the words of the prophet, the application of them by the evangelist is equally just and faithful; for as the former scene he relates was transacted upon the very same stage,—in the same district of Bethlehem, near Rama,—where so many mothers of the same tribe now suffered this second most affecting blow,—the words of Jeremiah, as the evangelist observes, were literally accomplished; and, no doubt, in that horrid day, a voice was heard again in Rama; lamentation and bitter weeping:—Rachel weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted:—every Bethlehemitish mother involved in this calamity, behold-

ing it with hopeless sorrow,—gave vent to it,—each one bewailing her children, and lamenting the hardness of their lot, with the anguish of a heart as incapable of consolation as they were of redress. Monster!—could no consideration of all this tender sorrow stay thy hands?—Could no reflection upon so much bitter lamentation, throughout the coasts of Bethlehem, interpose and plead in behalf of so many wretched objects as this tragedy would make? —Was there no way open to ambition, but that thou must trample upon the affections of nature? Could no pity for the innocence of childhood,—no sympathy for the yearnings of parental love, incline thee to some other measures for thy security,—but thou must thus pitilessly rush in,—take the victim by violence,—tear it from the embraces of the mother,—offer it up before her eyes,—leave her disconsolate forever,—broken-hearted with a loss,—so affecting in itself,—so circumstanced with horror, that no time, how friendly soever to the mournful,—should ever be able to wear out the impression?

There is nothing in which the mind of man is more divided than in accounts of this horrid nature. —For when we consider man as fashioned by his Maker,—innocent and upright,—full of the tenderest dispositions,—with a heart inclining him to kindness, and the love and protection of his species; —this idea of him would almost shake the credit of such accounts;—so that to clear them,—we are forced to take a second view of man,—very different from this favourable one, in which we insensibly represent him to our imaginations;—that is,—we are obliged to consider him,—not as he was made,—but as he is;—a creature by the violence

and irregularity of his passions, capable of being perverted from all these friendly and benevolent propensities, and sometimes hurried into excesses so opposite to them, as to render the most unnatural and horrid accounts of what he does but too probable.—The truth of this observation will be exemplified in the case before us. For next to the faith and character of the historian who reports such facts,—the particular character of the person who committed them, is to be considered as a voucher for their truth and credibility;—and if, upon inquiry, it appears, that the man acted but consistent with himself,—and just so you would have expected from his principles,—the credit of the historian is restored,—and the fact related stands incontestable, from so strong and concurring an evidence on its side.

With this view, it may not be an unacceptable application of the remaining part of a discourse upon this day, to give you a sketch of the character of Herod,—not as drawn from scripture,—for in general it furnishes us with few materials for such descriptions;—the sacred scripture cuts off in few words the history of the ungodly, how great soever they were in the eyes of the world;—and, on the other hand, dwells largely upon the smallest actions of the righteous.—We find all the circumstances of the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, recorded in the minutest manner.—The wicked seem only mentioned with regret; just brought upon the stage, on purpose to be condemned. The use and advantage of which conduct—is, I suppose, the reason,—as in general it enlarges on no character but what is worthy of imitation. 'Tis however un-

deniable, that the lives of bad men are not without use;—and whenever such a one is drawn, not with a corrupt view to be admired,—but on purpose to be detested,—it must excite such a horror against vice, as will strike indirectly the same good impression. And though it is painful in the last degree to paint a man in the shades which his vices have cast upon him,—yet when it serves this end, and at the same time illustrates a point in sacred history,—it carries its own excuse with it.

This Herod, therefore, of whom the evangelist speaks, if you take a superficial view of his life, you would say was a compound of good and evil;—that though he was certainly a bad man,—yet you would think the mass was tempered at the same time with a mixture of good qualities; so that in course, as is not uncommon, he would appear with two characters, very different from each other. If you looked on the more favourable side, you would see a man of great address,—popular in his behaviour,—generous,—prince-like in his entertainments and expenses,—and, in a word, set off with all such virtues and shewy properties as bid high for the countenance and approbation of the world.

View him in another light, he was an ambitious, designing man,—suspicious of all the world,—rapacious,—implacable in his temper,—without sense of religion—or feeling of humanity.—Now, in all such complex characters as this,—the way the world usually judges is,—to sum up the good and the bad against each other,—deduct the lesser of these articles from the greater, and (as we do in passing other accounts) give credit to the man for what remains upon the balance.—Now, though this

seems a fair,—yet I fear it is often a fallacious reckoning,—which, though it may serve in many ordinary cases of private life, yet will not hold good in the more notorious instances of men's lives, especially when so complicated with good and bad, as to exceed all common bounds and proportions.—Not to be deceived in such cases, we must work by a different rule; which, though it may appear less candid,—yet, to make amends, I am persuaded will bring us in general much nearer to the thing we want,—which is truth: the way to which is,—in all judgments of this kind, to distinguish and carry in your eye the principal and ruling passion which leads the character,—and separate that from the other parts of it;—and then take notice, how far his other qualities, good and bad, are brought to serve and support that. For want of this distinction, we often think ourselves inconsistent creatures when we are the farthest from it; and all the variety of shapes and contradictory appearances we put on, are in truth but so many different attempts to gratify the same governing appetite.

With this clew, let us endeavour to unravel this character of Herod as here given.

The first thing which strikes one in it, is ambition,—an immoderate thirst, as well as jealousy, of power.—How inconsistent soever in other parts, his character appears invariable in this,—and every action of his life was true to it.—From hence we may venture to conclude, that this was *his* ruling passion;—and that most, if not all the other wheels, were put in motion by this first spring. Now let us consider how far this was the case in fact.

To begin with the worst part of him,—I said he was a man of no sense of religion, or at least no other sense of it but that which served his turn;—for he is recorded to have built temples in Judea, and erected images in them for idolatrous worship,—not from a persuasion of doing right, for he was bred a Jew, and consequently taught to abhor all idolatry;—but he was in truth sacrificing all this time to a greater idol of his own,—his ruling passion; for, if we may trust Josephus, his sole view in so gross a compliance was to ingratiate himself with Augustus and the great men of Rome, from whom he held his power.—With this he was greedy and rapacious.—How could he be otherwise, with so devouring an appetite as ambition to provide for?—He was jealous in his nature, and suspicious of all the world.—Shew me an ambitious man that is not so; for as such a man's hand, like Ishmael's, is against every man,—he concludes, that every man's hand in course is against him.

Few men were ever guilty of more astonishing acts of cruelty;—and yet the particular instances of them in Herod were such as he was hurried into by the alarms this waking passion perpetually gave him. He put the whole Sanhedrim to the sword,—sparing neither age, wisdom, nor merit!—One cannot suppose, simply from an inclination to cruelty:—no;—they had opposed the establishment of his power at Jerusalem.

His own sons, two hopeful youths, he cut off by a publick execution!—The worst men have natural affection;—and such a stroke as this would run so contrary to the natural workings of it, that you are forced to suppose the impulse of some more violent

inclination to over-rule and conquer it.—And so it was; for the Jewish historian tells us, 'twas jealousy of power,—his darling object,—of which he feared they would one day or other dispossess him:—sufficient inducement to transport a man of such a temper into the bloodiest excesses.

Thus far this one fatal and extravagant passion accounts for the dark side of Herod's character. This governing principle being first laid open,—all his other bad actions follow in course, like so many symptomatick complaints from the same distemper.

Let us see if this was not the case even of his virtues too.

At first sight, it seems a mystery—how a man so black as Herod has been thus far described,—should be able to support himself in the favour and friendship of so wise and penetrating a body of men as the Roman senate, of whom he held his power! To counterbalance the weight of so bad and detested a character,—and be able to bear it up as Herod did, one would think he must have been master of some great secret, worth inquiring after.—He was so. But that secret was no other than what appears on this reverse of his character.—He was a person of great address;—popular in his outward behaviour.—He was generous, prince-like in his entertainments and expenses. The world was then as corrupt, at least, as now,—and Herod understood it;—knew at what price it was to be bought,—and what qualities would bid the highest for its good word and approbation.

And, in truth, he judged this matter so well,—that, notwithstanding the general odium and prepossession which arose against so hateful a character,

—in spite of all the impressions from so many repeated complaints of his cruelties and oppresions, —he yet stemmed the torrent ;—and, by the specious display of these popular virtues, bore himself up against it all his life ;—so that, at length, when he was summoned to Rome to answer for his crimes, —Josephus tells us,—that by the mere magnificence of his expenses,—and the apparent generosity of his behaviour, he entirely confuted the whole charge ; —and so ingratiated himself with the Roman senate, —and won the heart of Augustus (as he had that of Anthony before) that he ever after had his favour and kindness :—which I cannot mention without adding, that it is an eternal stain upon the character and memory of Augustus, that he sold his countenance and protection to so bad a man, for so mean and base a consideration.

From this point of view, if we look back upon Herod,—his best qualities will shrink into little room ; and how glittering soever in appearance, when brought to this balance, are found wanting. And, in truth, if we would not willingly be deceived in the value of any virtue or set of virtues in so complex a character,—we must call them to this very account ; examine whom they serve, what passion and what principle they have for their master. When this is understood, the whole clew is unravelled at once, and the character of Herod, as complicated as it is given us in history,—when thus analysed, is summed up in three words,—'That he 'was a man of unbounded ambition, who stuck at 'nothing to gratify it ;'—so that not only his vices were ministerial to his ruling passion, but his vir-

tues too (if they deserve the name) were drawn in, and listed into the same service.

Thus much for the character of Herod;—the critical review of which has many obvious uses, to which I may trust you, having time but to mention that particular one which first led me into this examination;—namely, That all objections against the evangelist's account of this day's slaughter of the Bethlehemitish infants,—from the incredibility of so horrid an account,—are silenced by this account of the man; since, in this, he acted but like himself, and just so as you would expect in the same circumstances, from every man of so ambitious a head—and so bad a heart.—Consider, what havock ambition has made!—how often the same tragedy has been acted upon larger theatres,—where not only the innocence of childhood,—or the grey hairs of the aged, have found no protection,—but whole countries, without distinction, have been put to the sword! or, what is as cruel, have been driven forth to nakedness and famine, to make way for new ones, under the guidance of this passion.—For a specimen of this, reflect upon the story related by Plutarch; when, by the order of the Roman senate, seventy populous cities were unawares sacked and destroyed, at one prefixed hour, by P. Æmilius;—by whom one hundred and fifty thousand unhappy people were driven in one day into captivity,—to be sold to the highest bidder,—to end their days in cruel labour and anguish! As astonishing as the account before us is, it vanishes into nothing from such views, since it is plain, from all history, that there is no wickedness too great for so unbounded a

cause,—and that the most horrid accounts in history are, as I said above, but too probable effects of it.

May God of his mercy defend mankind from future experiments of this kind!—and grant we may make a proper use of them, for the sake of Jesus Christ! Amen.

SERMON X.

JOB'S ACCOUNT OF THE SHORTNESS AND TROUBLES OF LIFE CONSIDERED.

JOB XIV. 1, 2.

Man that is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble:—He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.

THERE is something in this reflection of holy Job's, upon the shortness of life and instability of human affairs, so beautiful and truly sublime, that one might challenge the writings of the most celebrated orators of antiquity to produce a specimen of eloquence so noble and thoroughly affecting. Whether this effect be owing in some measure to the pathetick nature of the subject reflected on; or to the eastern manner of expression, in a style more exalted and suitable to so great a subject; or, which is the more likely account, because they are properly the words of that Being who first inspired man with language, and taught his mouth to utter; who opened the lips of the dumb, and made the tongue of the infant eloquent;—to which of these we are to refer the beauty and sublimity of this, as well as that of numberless other passages in holy writ, may not seem now material; but surely, without these helps never man was better qualified to make just and noble reflections upon the shortness of life and instability of human affairs, than Job was, who had him-

self waded through such a sea of troubles, and in his passage had encountered many vicissitudes of storms and sunshine, and by turns had felt both the extremes of all the happiness and all the wretchedness that mortal man is heir to.

The beginning of his days was crowned with every thing that ambition could wish for ;—he was the greatest of all the men of the east,—had large and unbounded possessions, and no doubt enjoyed all the comforts and advantages of life which they could administer.—Perhaps you will say a wise man might not be inclined to give a full loose to this kind of happiness, without some better security for the support of it than the mere possession of such goods of fortune, which often slip from under us, and sometimes unaccountably make themselves wings and fly away.—But he had that security too ;—for the hand of Providence which had thus far protected, was still leading him forwards, and seemed engaged in the preservation and continuance of these blessings.—God had set a hedge about him, and about all that he had on every side ; he had blessed all the works of his hands, and his substance increased every day. Indeed, even with this security, riches to him that hath neither child nor brother, as the wise man observes, instead of a comfort, prove sometimes a sore travail and vexation.—The mind of man is not always satisfied with the reasonable assurance of its own enjoyments, but will look forwards, as if it discovers some imaginary void ; the want of some beloved object to fill his place after him, will often disquiet itself in vain, and say, "For "whom do I labour, and bereave myself of rest?"

This bar to his happiness God had likewise taken

away, in blessing him with a numerous offspring of sons and daughters, the apparent inheritors of all his present happiness.—Pleasing reflection! to think the blessings God has indulged one's self in, shall be handed and continued down to a man's own seed! how little does this differ from a second enjoyment of them to an affectionate parent, who naturally looks forward with as strong an interest upon his children, as if he was to live over again in his own posterity!

What could be wanting to finish such a picture of a happy man?—Surely nothing, except a virtuous disposition to give a relish to these blessings, and direct him to make a proper use of them.—He had that too; for he was a perfect and upright man; one that feared God and eschewed evil.

In the midst of all this prosperity, which was as great as could well fall to the share of one man;—whilst all the world looked gay, and smiled upon him, and every thing round him seemed to promise, if possible, an increase of happiness,—in one instant all is changed into sorrow and utter despair!

It pleased God, for wise purposes, to blast the fortunes of his house, and cut off the hopes of his posterity, and, in one mournful day, to bring this great prince from his palace down to the dunghill. His flocks and herds, in which consisted the abundance of his wealth, were part consumed by a fire from heaven; the remainder taken away by the sword of the enemy: his sons and daughters, whom 'tis natural to imagine so good a man had so brought up in a sense of their duty, as to give him all reasonable hopes of much joy and pleasure in their future lives:—natural prospect for a parent to look forwards

at, to recompense him for the many cares and anxieties which their infancy had cost him! these dear pledges of his future happiness were all, all snatched from him at one blow, just at the time that one might imagine they were beginning to be the comfort and delight of his old age, which most wanted such staves to lean on;—and as circumstances add to an evil, so they did to this;—for it fell out, not only by a very calamitous accident, which was grievous enough in itself, but likewise upon the back of his other misfortunes, when he was ill prepared to bear such a shock; and what would still add to it, it happened at an hour when he had least reason to expect it, when he would naturally think his children secure and out of the way of danger:—"For "whilst they were feasting and making merry in "their eldest brother's house, a great wind out of "the wilderness smote the four corners of the house, "and it fell upon them."

Such a concurrence of misfortunes is not the common lot of many: and yet there are instances of some who have undergone as severe trials, and bravely struggled under them; perhaps by natural force of spirits, the advantages of health, and the cordial assistance of a friend. And with these helps, what may not a man sustain?—But this was not Job's case; for scarce had these evils fallen upon him, when he was not only borne down with a grievous distemper, which afflicted him from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, but likewise his three friends, in whose kind consolations he might have found a medicine,—even the wife of his bosom, whose duty it was with a gentle hand to have softened all his sorrows,—instead of doing this, they cru-

elly insulted and became the reproachers of his integrity! O God! what is man when thou thus bruisest him, and makest his burden heavier, as his strength grows less!—Who, that had found himself thus an example of the many changes and chances of this mortal life;—when he considered himself now stripped and left destitute of so many valuable blessings which the moment before thy providence had poured upon his head;—when he reflected upon this gay delightsome structure, in appearance so strongly built, so pleasingly surrounded with every thing that could flatter his hopes and wishes, and beheld it all levelled with the ground in one moment, and the whole prospect vanish with it, like the description of an enchantment,—who I say that had seen and felt the shock of so sudden a revolution, would not have been furnished with just and beautiful reflections upon the occasion, and said with Job in the words of the text, that "Man that is born of a "woman, is of few days, and full of misery;—that "he cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down; "he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not!"

The words of the text are an epitome of the natural and moral vanity of man; and contain two distinct declarations concerning his state and condition in each respect.

First, that he is a creature of few days; and secondly, that those days are full of trouble.

I shall make some reflections upon each of these in their order, and conclude with a practical lesson from the whole.

And first, That he is of few days. The comparison which Job makes use of, 'That man cometh forth like a flower,' is extremely beautiful, and more

to the purpose than the most elaborate proof, which in truth the subject will not easily admit of ;—the shortness of life being a point so generally complained of in all ages since the flood, and so universally felt and acknowledged by the whole species, as to require no evidence beyond a similitude ; the intent of which is not so much to prove the fact, as to illustrate and place it in such a light as to strike us, and bring the impression home to ourselves in a more affecting manner.

Man comes forth, says Job, like a flower, and is cut down ;—he is sent into the world the fairest and noblest part of God's works,—fashioned after the image of his Creator with respect to reason and the great faculties of the mind ; he cometh forth glorious as the flower of the field : as it surpasses the vegetable world in beauty, so does he the animal world in the glory and excellencies of his nature.

The one,—if no untimely accident oppress it, soon arrives at the full period of its perfection,—is suffered to triumph for a few moments, and is plucked up by the roots in the very pride and gayest stage of its being :—or, if it happens to escape the hands of violence, in a few days it necessarily sickens of itself and dies away.

Man likewise, though his progress is slower, and his duration something longer, yet the periods of his growth and declension are nearly the same, both in the nature and manner of them.

If he escapes the dangers which threaten his tender years, he is soon got into the full maturity and strength of life ; and if he is so fortunate as not to be hurried out of it then by accidents, by his own folly and intemperance ;—if he escapes these, he

naturally decays of himself;—a period comes fast upon him, beyond which he was not made to last. ——Like a flower or fruit which may be plucked up by force before the time of their maturity, yet cannot be made to outgrow the period when they are to fade and drop of themselves; when that comes, the hand of nature then plucks them both off, and no art of the botanist can uphold the one, or skill of the physician preserve the other, beyond the periods to which their original frames and constitutions were made to extend. As God has appointed and determined the several growths and decays of the vegetable race, so he seems as evidently to have prescribed the same laws to man, as well as all living creatures, in the first rudiments of which there are contained the specifick powers of their growth, duration, and extinction; and when the evolutions of those animal powers are exhausted and run down, the creature expires and dies of itself, as ripe fruit falls from the tree, or a flower preserved beyond its bloom drops and perishes upon the stalk.

Thus much for this comparison of Job's, which, though it is very poetical, yet conveys a just idea of the thing referred to.——"That he fleeth also as a "shadow, and continueth not,"—is no less a faithful and fine representation of the shortness and vanity of human life; of which one cannot give a better explanation, than by referring to the original, from whence the picture was taken.—With how quick a succession do days, months, and years pass over our heads!—how truly like a shadow that departeth, do they flee away insensibly, and scarce leave an impression with us!——When we endeavour to call them back by reflection, and consider in what man-

ner they have gone, how unable are the best of us to give a tolerable account!—and were it not for some of the more remarkable stages which have distinguished a few periods of this rapid progress, —we should look back upon it all as Nebuchadnezzar did upon his dream when he awoke in the morning:—he was sensible many things had passed, and troubled him too, but had passed on so quickly, they had left no footsteps behind, by which he could be enabled to trace them back.——Melancholy account of the life of man! which generally runs on in such a manner, as scarce to allow time to make reflections which way it has gone!

How many of our first years slide by in the innocent sports of childhood, in which we are not able to make reflections upon them!—how many more thoughtless years escape us in our youth, when we are unwilling to do it, and are so eager in the pursuit of pleasure, as to have no time to spare, to stop and consider them!

When graver and riper years come on, and we begin to think it time to reform and set up for men of sense and conduct, then the business and perplexing interests of this world, and the endless plotting and contriving how to make the most of it, do so wholly employ us, that we are too busy to make reflections upon so unprofitable a subject.—As families and children increase, so do our affections, and with them are multiplied our cares and toils for their preservation and establishment;—all which take up our thoughts so closely, and possess them so long, that we are often overtaken by grey hairs before we see them, or have found leisure to consider how far we were got,—what we have been

doing,—and for what purpose God sent us into the world! As man may justly be said to be of few days, considered with respect to this hasty succession of things, which soon carries him into the decline of his life,—so may he likewise be said to flee like a shadow and continue not, when his duration is compared with other parts of God's works, and even the works of his own hands, which outlast him many generations;—whilst (as Homer observes) like leaves, one generation drops—and another springs up,—to fall again and be forgotten.

But when we farther consider his days in the light in which we ought chiefly to view them, as they appear in thy sight, O God! with whom a thousand years are but as yesterday; when we reflect that this hand-breadth of life is all that is measured out to man from that eternity for which he is created, how does his short span vanish to nothing in the comparison! 'Tis true, the greatest portion of time will do the same when compared with what is to come; and therefore so short and transitory a one as threescore years and ten, beyond which all is declared to be labour and sorrow, may the easier be allowed: and yet how uncertain are we of that portion, short as it is! Do not ten thousand accidents break off the slender thread of human life, long before it can be drawn out to that extent?—The new-born babe falls down an easy prey, and moulders back again into dust, like a tender blossom put forth in an untimely hour.—The hopeful youth in the very pride and beauty of his life is cut off; some cruel distemper or unthought-of accident lays him prostrate upon the earth (to pursue Job's comparison) like a blooming flower, smit and shrivelled up with

a malignant blast.—In this stage of life, chances multiply upon us,—the seeds of disorders are sown by intemperance or neglect,—infectious distempers are more easily contracted; when contracted, they rage with greater violence, and the success in many cases is more doubtful, insomuch that they who have exercised themselves in computations of this kind, tell us, "That one half of the whole species which "are born into the world, go out of it again, and are "all dead in so short a space as the first seventeen "years."

These reflections may be sufficient to illustrate the first part of Job's declaration, "That man is of "few days." Let us examine the truth of the other, and see whether he is not likewise full of trouble.

And here we must not take our account from the flattering outside of things, which are generally set off with a glittering appearance enough, especially in what is called higher life.—Nor can we safely trust the evidence of some of the more merry and thoughtless amongst us, who are so set upon the enjoyment of life, as seldom to reflect upon the troubles of it;—or who, prehaps, because they are not yet come to this portion of their inheritance, imagine it is not their common lot.—Nor, lastly, are we to form an idea of it from the delusive stories of a few of the most prosperous passengers, who have fortunately sailed through and escaped the rougher toils and distresses:—but we are to take our account from a close survey of human life, and the real face of things, stript of every thing that can palliate or gild it over. We must hear the general complaint of all ages, and read the histories of mankind. If we look into them, and examine them to the bottom,

what do they contain but the history of sad and uncomfortable passages, which a good-natured man cannot read but with oppression of spirits!—Consider the dreadful succession of wars in one part or other of the earth, perpetuated from one century to another with so little intermission, that mankind have scarce had time to breathe from them, since ambition first came into the world! consider the horrid effects of them in all those barbarous devastations we read of, where whole nations have been put to the sword, or have been driven out to nakedness and famine, to make room for new-comers!—Consider how great a part of our species, in all ages down to this, have been trod under the feet of cruel and capricious tyrants, who would neither hear their cries, nor pity their distresses!—Consider slavery,—what it is,—how bitter a draught, and how many millions have been made to drink of it!—which, if it can poison all earthly happiness, when exercised barely upon our bodies, what must it be when it comprehends both the slavery of body and mind!—To conceive this, look into the history of the Romish church and her tyrants, or rather executioners, who seem to have taken pleasure in the pangs and convulsions of their fellow-creatures!—Examine the inquisition, hear the melancholy notes sounded in every cell!—Consider the anguish of mock trials, and the exquisite tortures consequent thereupon, mercilessly inflicted upon the unfortunate, where the racked and weary soul has so often wished to take its leave,—but cruelly not suffered to depart!—Consider how many of these helpless wretches have been hauled from thence in all periods of this tyrannick usurpation, to undergo the massacres and

flames to which a false and a bloody religion has condemned them!

If this sad history and detail of the more publick causes of the miseries of man are not sufficient, let us behold him in another light, with respect to the more private causes of them, and see whether he is not full of trouble likewise there, and almost born to it as naturally as the sparks fly upwards. If we consider man as a creature full of wants and necessities, whether real or imaginary, which he is not able to supply of himself,—what a train of disappointments, vexations, and dependencies are to be seen issuing from thence, to perplex and make his being uneasy!——How many jostlings and hard struggles do we undergo, in making our way in the world!—How barbarously held back!—How often and basely overthrown, in aiming only at getting bread!—How many of us never attain it,—at least not comfortably,—but, from various and unknown causes,—eat it all our lives long in bitterness!

If we shift the scene, and look upwards, towards those whose situation in life seems to place them above the sorrows of this kind, yet where are they exempt from others? Do not all ranks and conditions of men meet with sad accidents and numberless calamities in other respects? which often make them go heavily all their lives long!

How many fall into chronical infirmities, which render both their days and nights restless and insupportable!——How many of the highest rank are tore up with ambition, or soured with disappointments! and how many more, from a thousand secret causes of disquiet, pine away in silence, and owe their deaths to sorrow and dejection of heart!——If

we cast our eyes upon the lowest class and condition of life,—the scene is more melancholy still.—Millions of our fellow-creatures, born to no inheritance but poverty and trouble, forced by the necessity of their lots to drudgery and painful employments, and hard set with that too, to get enough to keep themselves and families alive!—So that upon the whole, when we have examined the true state and condition of human life, and have made some allowances for a few fugacious, deceitful pleasures, there is scarce any thing to be found which contradicts Job's description of it.—Whichever way we look abroad, we see some legible characters of what God first denounced against us, "That in sorrow "we should eat our bread, till we return to the "ground from whence we were taken."*

But some one will say, Why are we thus to be put out of love with human life? To what purpose is it to expose the dark sides of it to us, or enlarge upon the infirmities which are natural, and consequently out of our power to redress?

I answer, That the subject is nevertheless of great importance, since it is necessary every creature should understand his present state and condition, to put him in mind of behaving suitably to it.—Does not an impartial survey of man,—the holding up this glass to shew him his defects and natural infirmities, naturally tend to cure his pride, and clothe him with humility? which is a dress that best becomes a short-lived and a wretched creature.—Does not the consideration of the shortness of our life,

* Most of these reflections upon the miseries of life, are taken from Woollaston.

convince us of the wisdom of dedicating so small a portion to the great purposes of eternity?

Lastly, When we reflect that this span of life, short as it is, is chequered with so many troubles, that there is nothing in this world springs up, or can be enjoyed without a mixture of sorrow, how insensibly does it incline us to turn our eyes and affections from so gloomy a prospect, and fix them upon that happier country, where afflictions cannot follow us, and where God will wipe away all tears from off our faces forever and ever! Amen.

SERMON XI.

EVIL-SPEAKING.

JAMES I 26.

If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man's religion is vain.

Of the many duties owing both to God and our neighbour, there are scarce any men so bad as not to acquit themselves of some; and few so good, I fear, as to practise all.

Every man seems willing enough to compound the matter, and adopt so much of the system as will least interfere with his principal and ruling passion; and for those parts which would occasion a more troublesome opposition, to consider them as hard sayings, and so leave them for those to practise, whose natural tempers are better suited to the struggle; so that a man shall be covetous, oppressive, revengeful, neither a lover of truth nor common honesty, and yet, at the same time, shall be *very* religious, and so sanctified, as not once to fail of paying his morning and evening sacrifice to God. So, on the other hand, a man shall live without God in the world, have neither any great sense of religion, nor indeed pretend to have any, and yet be of nicest honour, conscientiously just and fair in all his dealings. And here it is that men generally betray themselves, deceiving, as the apostle says, their own hearts; of which the instances are so various, in one

degree or other, throughout human life, that one might safely say, the bulk of mankind live in such a contradiction to themselves, that there is no character so hard to be met with as one which, upon a critical examination, will appear altogether uniform, and in every point consistent with itself.

If such a contrast was only observable in the different stages of a man's life, it would cease to be either a matter of wonder or of just reproach. Age, experience, and much reflection, may naturally enough be supposed to alter a man's sense of things, and so entirely to transform him, that, not only in outward appearances, but in the very cast and turn of his mind, he may be as unlike and different from the man he was twenty or thirty years ago, as he ever was from any thing of his own species. This, I say, is naturally to be accounted for, and in some cases might be praiseworthy too; but the observation is to be made of men in the same period of their lives, that in the same day, sometimes in the very same action, they are utterly inconsistent and irreconcileable with themselves.—Look at a man in one light, and he shall seem wise, penetrating, discreet, and brave: behold him in another point of view, and you see a creature all over folly and indiscretion, weak and timorous as cowardice and indiscretion can make him. A man shall appear gentle, courteous, and benevolent to all mankind: follow him into his own house, may be you see a tyrant, morose and savage to all whose happiness depends upon his kindness. A third in his general behaviour is found to be generous, disinterested, humane, and friendly:—hear but the sad story of the friendless orphans, too credulously trusting all their little

substance into his hands, and he shall appear more sordid, more pitiless and unjust than the injured themselves have bitterness to paint him. Another shall be charitable to the poor, uncharitable in his censures and opinions of all the rest of the world besides;—temperate in his appetites, intemperate in his tongue: shall have too much conscience and religion to cheat the man who trusts him, and, perhaps, as far as the business of debtor and creditor extends, shall be just and scrupulous to the uttermost mite; yet, in matters of full as great concern, where he is to have the handling of the party's reputation and good name,—the dearest, the tenderest property the man has, he will do him irreparable damage, and rob him there without measure or pity.

And this seems to be that particular piece of inconsistency and contradiction which the text is levelled at, in which the words seem so pointed, as if St. James had known more flagrant instances of this kind of delusion than what had fallen under the observation of any of the rest of the apostles; he being more remarkably vehement and copious upon that subject than any other.

Doubtless, some of his converts had been notoriously wicked and licentious in this remorseless practice of defamation and evil-speaking. Perhaps the holy man, though spotless as an angel (for no character is too sacred for calumny to blacken) had grievously suffered himself, and, as his blessed Master foretold him, had been cruelly reviled and evil *spoken* of.

All his labours in the gospel, his unaffected and perpetual solicitude for the preservation of his flock, his watchings and fastings, his poverty, his natural

simplicity and innocence of life, *all* perhaps were not enough to defend him from this unruly weapon, so full of deadly poison:—and what, in all likelihood, might move his sorrow and indignation more, some who seemed the most devout and zealous of all his converts, were the most merciless and uncharitable in that respect: having a form of godliness, full of bitter envyings and strife.

With such it is that he expostulates so largely in the third chapter of his epistle: and there is something in his vivacity tempered with such affection and concern, as well suited the character of an inspired man. My brethren, says the apostle, these things ought not to be.—The wisdom that is from above, is pure, peaceable, gentle, full of mercy, without partiality, without hypocrisy.—The wisdom from above,—that heavenly religion which I have preached to you, is pure, alike, and consistent with itself in all its parts; like its great Author, 'tis universally kind and benevolent in all cases and circumstances. Its first glad tidings were peace upon earth, good-will towards men; its chief corner-stone, its most distinguishing character is love,—that kind principle which brought it down, in the pure exercise of which consists the chief enjoyment of heaven, from whence it came. But this practice, my brethren, cometh not from above, but it is earthly, sensual, devilish, full of confusion and every evil work. Reflect then a moment:—Can a fountain send forth, at the same place, sweet water and bitter? Can the fig-tree, my brethren, bear olive-berries? either a vine, figs? Lay your hands upon your hearts, and let your consciences speak.—Ought not the same just principle, which restrains you from

cruelty and wrong in one case, equally to withhold you from it in another?—Should not charity and good-will, like the principle of life, circulating through the smallest vessels in every member, ought it not to operate as regularly upon you throughout, as well upon your words as upon your actions?

If a man is wise and endued with knowledge, let him shew it out of a good conversation, with meekness of wisdom. But,—if any man amongst you seemeth to be religious—(seemeth to be,—for truly religious he cannot be)—and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.—This is the full force of St. James's reasoning, upon which I have dwelt the more, it being the foundation upon which is grounded this clear decision of the matter left us in the text:—in which the apostle seems to have set the two characters of a saint and a slanderer at such variance, that one would have thought they could never have had a heart to have met together again. But there are no alliances too strange for this world.—How many may we observe every day, even of the gentler sex as well as our own, who, without conviction of doing much wrong, in the midst of a full career of calumny and defamation, rise up punctual at the stated hour of prayer, leave the cruel story half untold till they return;—go,—and kneel down before the throne of heaven, thank God that he had not made them like others, and that his Holy Spirit had enabled them to perform the duties of the day in so christian and conscientious a manner!

This delusive itch for slander, too common in all ranks of people, whether to gratify a little ungener-

ous resentment;—whether oftener out of a principle of levelling, from a narrowness and poverty of soul, ever impatient of merit and superiority in others;—whether from a mean ambition, or the insatiate lust of being witty (a talent in which ill-nature and malice are no ingredients;)—or lastly, whether from a natural cruelty of disposition, abstracted from all views and considerations of self:—to which one, or whether to all jointly, we are indebted for this contagious malady, thus much is certain, from whatever seeds it springs, the growth and progress of it are as destructive to as they are unbecoming a civilized people. To pass a hard and ill-natured reflection upon an undesigning action;—to invent, or, which is equally bad, to propagate a vexatious report without colour and grounds;—to plunder an innocent man of his character and good name, a jewel which, perhaps, he has starved himself to purchase, and probably would hazard his life to secure;—to rob him at the same time of his happiness and peace of mind, perhaps his bread,—the bread, may be, of a virtuous family; and all this, as Solomon says of the madman who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, and saith, Am I not in sport? all this out of wantonness, and oftener from worse motives,—the whole appears such a complication of badness, as requires no words or warmth of fancy to aggravate. Pride, treachery, envy, hypocrisy, malice, cruelty, and self-love, may have been said, in one shape or other, to have occasioned all the frauds and mischiefs that ever happened in the world; but the chances against a coincidence of them all in one person are so many, that one would have supposed the character of a common slander-

er, as rare and difficult a production in nature as that of a great genius, which seldom happens above once in an age.

But whatever was the case when St. James wrote his epistle, we have been very successful in later days, and have found out the art, by a proper management of light and shade, to compound all these vices together, so as to give body and strength to the whole, whilst no one but a discerning artist is able to discover the labours that join in finishing the picture;—and, indeed, like many other bad originals in the world,—it stands in need of all the disguise it has.—For who could be enamoured of a character made up of so loathsome a compound,—could they behold it naked,—in its crooked and deformed shape,—with all its natural and detested infirmities laid open to publick view?

And, therefore, it were to be wished, that one would do in this malignant case of the mind,—what is generally done for the publick good in the more malignant and epidemical cases of the body;—that is,—When they are found infectious,—to write a history of the distemper,—and ascertain all the symptoms of the malady, so that every one might know whom he might venture to go near, with tolerable safety to himself.—But alas! the symptoms of this appear in so many strange and contradictory shapes, and vary so wonderfully with the temper and habit of the patient, that they are not to be classed,—nor reduced to any one regular system.

Ten thousand are the vehicles in which this deadly poison is prepared and communicated to the world;—and, by some artful hands, 'tis done by so

subtle and nice an infusion, that it is not to be tasted or discovered but by its effects.

How frequently is the honesty and integrity of a man disposed of by a smile or a shrug!—How many good and generous actions have been sunk into oblivion by a distrustful look!—or stamped with the imputation of proceeding from bad motives, by a mysterious and seasonable whisper!

Look into companies of those whose gentle natures should disarm them,—we shall find no better account.—How large a portion of chastity is sent out of the world by distant hints,—nodded away, and cruelly winked into suspicion by the envy of those who are past all temptation of it themselves!—How often does the reputation of a helpless creature bleed by report,—which the party who is at the pains to propagate it, beholds with much pity and fellow-feeling!—that she is heartily sorry for it,—hopes in God it is not true!—however, as Archbishop Tillotson wittily observes upon it, is resolved, in the mean time, to give the report her pass, that at least it may have fair play to take its fortune in the world,—to be believed or not, according to the charity of those into whose hands it shall happen to fall.

So fruitful is this vice in a variety of experiments, to satiate as well as disguise itself. But if these smoother weapons cut so sore,—what shall we say of open and unblushing scandal,—subjected to no caution,—tied down to no restraints?—If the one, like an arrow shot in the dark, does nevertheless so much secret mischief,—this, like the pestilence which rageth at noon-day, sweeps all before it, levelling without distinction the good and the bad; a

thousand fall beside it, and ten thousand on its right hand ;—they fall,—so rent and torn in this tender part of them, so unmercifully butchered, as sometimes never to recover either the wounds or the anguish of heart which they have occasioned.

But there is nothing so bad which will not admit of something to be said in its defence.

And here it may be asked,—Whether the inconveniences and ill effects which the world feels from the licentiousness of this practice, are not sufficiently counterbalanced by the real influence it has upon mens lives and conduct ?—That if there was no evil-speaking in the world, thousands would be encouraged to do ill,—and would rush into many indecorums, like a horse into the battle, were they sure to escape the tongues of men.

That if we take a general view of the world,—we shall find that a great deal of virtue,—at least of the outward appearance of it,—is not so much from any fixed principle, as the terror of what the world will say,—and the liberty it will take upon the occasions we shall give.

That, if we descend to particulars, numbers are every day taking more pains to be well spoken of,—than what would actually enable them to live so as to deserve it.

That there are many of both sexes who can support life well enough without honour and chastity, —who, without reputation (which is but the opinion which the world has of the matter) would hide their heads in shame, and sink down in utter despair of happiness.—No doubt the tongue is a weapon which does chastise many indecorums, which the laws of men will not reach ;—and keeps many in awe,—

whom conscience will not ;—and where the case is indisputably flagrant,—the speaking of it in such words as it deserves,—scarce comes within the prohibition.—In many cases, 'tis hard to express ourselves so as to fix a distinction betwixt opposite characters ; and sometimes it may be as much a debt we owe to virtue, and as great a piece of justice to expose a vitious character, and paint it in its proper colours,—as it is to speak well of the deserving, and describe his particular virtues.—And, indeed, when we inflict this punishment upon the bad, merely out of principle, and without indulgence to any private passion of our own,—'tis a case which happens so seldom, that one might venture to accept it.

However, to those who in this objection are really concerned for the cause of virtue, I cannot help recommending what would much more effectually serve her interest, and be a surer token of their zeal and attachment to her ; and that is,—in all such plain instances where it seems to be duty, to fix a distinction betwixt the good and the bad ;—to let their actions speak it instead of their words, or at least to let them both speak one language. We all of us talk so loud against vitious characters, and are so unanimous in our cry against them,—that an unexperienced man, who only trusted his ears, would imagine the whole world was in an uproar about it, and that mankind were all associating together, to hunt vice utterly out of the world.—Shift the scene, —and let him behold the reception which vice meets with ; he will see the conduct and behaviour of the world towards it, so opposite to their declarations :—he will find all he heard, so contradicted by what he saw,—as to leave him in doubt which of his senses

he is to trust,—or in which of the two cases mankind were really in earnest. Was there virtue enough in the world to make a general stand against this contradiction ;—that is,—was every one who deserved to be ill spoken of,—sure to be ill looked on too ;—was it a certain consequence of the loss of a man's character,—to lose his friends,—to lose the advantages of his birth and fortune,—and thenceforth be universally shunned, universally slighted ;—

Was no quality a shelter against the indecorums of the other sex, but was every woman without distinction who had justly forfeited her reputation,—from that moment was she sure to forfeit likewise all claim to civility and respect ;—

Or, in a word, could it be established as a law in our ceremonial,—that wherever characters in either sex were become notorious,—it should be deemed infamous, either to pay or receive a visit from them, and the door were to be shut against them in all publick places, till they had satisfied the world by giving testimony of a better life,—a few such plain and honest maxims faithfully put in practice, —would force us upon some degree of reformation. Till this is done,—it avails little that we have no mercy upon them with our tongues, since they escape without feeling any other inconvenience.

We all cry out that the world is corrupt ;—and I fear too justly :—but we never reflect what we have to thank for it, and that our open countenance of vice, which gives the lie to our private censures of it, is its chief protection and encouragement.—To those however who still believe that evil-speaking is some terror to evil-doers, one may answer, as a great man has done upon the occasion,—That after

all our exhortations against it,—'tis not to be feared, but that there will be evil-speaking enough left in the world to chastise the guilty ;—and we may safely trust them to an ill-natured world, that there will be no failure of justice upon this score.—The passions of men are pretty severe executioners ; and to them let us leave this ungrateful task,—and rather ourselves endeavour to cultivate that more friendly one, recommended by the apostle,—of letting all bitterness, and wrath, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from us ;—of being kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, forgave us. Amen.

SERMON XII.

JOSEPH'S HISTORY CONSIDERED.

FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES.

GENESIS L. 15.

And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evils which we did unto him.

THERE are few instances of the exercise of particular virtues which seem harder to attain to, or which appear more amiable and engaging in themselves, than those of moderation and the forgiveness of injuries; and, when the temptations against them happen to be heightened by the bitterness of a provocation on one hand, and the fairness of an opportunity to retaliate on the other, the instances *then* are truly great and heroick. The words of the text (which are the consultation of the sons of Jacob amongst themselves upon their father Israel's death, when, because it was in Joseph's power to revenge the deadly injury they had formerly done him, they concluded, in course, that it was in his intention)—will lead us to a beautiful example of this kind in the character and behaviour of Joseph consequent thereupon; and, as it seems a perfect and very engaging pattern of forbearance, it may not be improper to make it serve for the ground-work of a discourse upon that subject.——The whole transaction,

from the first occasion given by Joseph in his youth, to this last act of remission, at the conclusion of his life, may be said to be a master-piece of history. There is, not only in the manner throughout, such a happy, though uncommon, mixture of simplicity and grandeur, which is a double character, so hard to be united, that it is seldom to be met with in compositions merely human ;—but it is likewise related with the greatest variety of tender and affecting circumstances, which would afford matter for reflections useful for the conduct of almost every part and stage of a man's life.—But as the words of the text, as well as the intention and compass of this discourse, particularly confine me to speak only to one point, namely, the forgiveness of injuries, it will be proper only to consider such circumstances of the story as will place this instance of it in its just light, and then proceed to make a more general use of the great example of moderation and forbearance which it sets before us.

It seems strange, at first sight, that, after the sons of Jacob had fallen into Joseph's power, when they were forced by the soreness of the famine to go down into Egypt to buy corn, and had found him too good a man even to expostulate with them for an injury, which he seemed then to have digested, and piously to have resolved into the over-ruling providence of God, for the preservation of much people, how they could ever after question the uprightness of his intentions, or entertain the least suspicion that his reconciliation was dissembled. Would one have imagined, that the man who had discovered such a goodness of soul, that he sought where to weep, because he could not bear the struggles of a

counterfeited harshness, could ever be suspected afterwards of intending a real one?—and that he only waited till their father Israel's death, to requite them all the evil which they had done unto him? What still adds to this difficulty is, that his affectionate manner in making himself known to them,—his goodness in forbearing not only to reproach them for the injury they had formerly done him, but extenuating and excusing the fault to themselves, his comforting and speaking kindly to them, and seconding all with the tenderest marks of an undisguised forgiveness, in falling upon their necks and weeping aloud, that all the house of Pharaoh heard him;—that, moreover, this behaviour of Joseph could not appear to them to be the effect of any warm and sudden transport, which might as suddenly give way to other reflections, but that it evidently sprung from a settled principle of uncommon generosity in his nature, which was above the temptation of making use of an opportunity for revenge, which the course of God's providence had put into his hands for better purposes; and, what might still seem to confirm this, was the evidence of his actions to them afterwards, in bringing them and all their household up out of Canaan, and placing them near him in the land of Goshen, the richest part of Egypt, where they had had so many years experience of his love and kindness:—and yet it is plain all this did not clear his motive from suspicion, or, at least, themselves of some apprehensions of a change in his conduct towards them. And was it not that the whole transaction was written under the direction of the Spirit of Truth, and that other historians concur in doing justice to Joseph's char-

acter, and speak of him as a compassionate and merciful man, one would be apt, you will say, to imagine here, that Moses might possibly have omitted some circumstances of Joseph's behaviour, which had alarmed his brethren, betwixt the time of his first reconciliation and that of their father's death; —for they could not be suspicious of his intentions without some cause, and fear where no fear was:— But does not a guilty conscience often do so,—and, though it has the grounds, yet wants the power to think itself safe?

And could we look into the hearts of those who know they deserve ill, we should find many an instance, where a kindness from an injured hand, where there was least reason to expect one, has struck deeper, and touched the heart with a degree of remorse and concern, which, perhaps, no severity or resentment could have reached. This reflection will, in some measure, help to explain this difficulty, which occurs in the story; for it is observable, that, when the injury they had done their brother was first committed, and the fact was fresh upon their minds, and most likely to have filled them with a sense of guilt, we find no acknowledgment or complaint to one another of such a load as, one might imagine, it had laid upon them; and from that event, through a long course of years, to the time they had gone down to Egypt, we read not once of any sorrow, or compunction of heart, which they had felt during all that time, for what they had done. They had artfully imposed upon their parent —(and, as men are ingenious casuists in their own affairs) they had, probably, as artfully imposed upon their own consciences;—and, possibly, had never

impartially reflected upon the action, or considered it in its just light, till the many acts of their brother's love and kindness had brought it before them, with all the circumstances of aggravation which his behaviour would naturally give it :—they then began maturely to consider what they had done ;—that they had first undeservedly hated him in his childhood for that which, if it was a ground of complaint, ought rather to have been charged upon the indiscretion of the parent, than considered as a fault in him ;—that, upon a more just examination and a better knowledge of their brother, they had wanted even that pretence. It was not a blind partiality which seemed first to have directed their father's affection to him,—though then they thought so;—for, doubtless, so much goodness and benevolence as shone forth in his nature, now that he was a man, could not lie all of it so deep concealed in his youth, but the sagacity of a parent's eye would discover it; and that, in course, their enmity towards him was founded upon that which ought to have won their esteem.—That, if he had incautiously added envy to their ill-will in reporting his dreams, which presaged his future greatness, it was but the indiscretion of a youth unpractised in the world, who had not yet found out the art of dissembling his hopes and expectations; and was scarce arrived at an age to comprehend there was such a thing in the world as envy and ambition ;—that if such offences in a brother, so fairly carried their own excuses with them, what could they say for themselves, when they considered it was for this they had almost unanimously conspired to rob him of his life ; and, though they were happily restrained from shedding his blood upon

Reuben's remonstrance, that they had, nevertheless, all the guilt of the intention to answer for? That whatever motive it was which then stayed their hands, their consciences told them it could not be a good one, since they had changed the sentence for one no less cruel in itself, and what, to an ingenuous nature, was worse than death, to be sold for a slave. —The one was common to all, the other only to the unfortunate. That it was not compassion which then took place; for, had there been any way open to that, his tears and intreaties must have found it, when they saw the anguish of his soul;—when he besought, and they would not hear.—That if aught still could heighten the remorse of banishing a youth without provocation, forever from his country and the protection of his parent, to be exposed naked to the buffetings of the world, and the rough hand of some merciless master, they would find it in this reflection, 'That the many afflictions and hard-'ships, which they might naturally have expected 'would overtake the lad, consequent upon this ac-'tion, had actually fallen upon him.'

That, besides the anguish of suspected virtue, he had felt that of a prison, where he had long lain neglected in a friendless condition; and, where the affliction of it was rendered still sharper by the daily expectation of being remembered by Pharaoh's chief butler, and the disappointment of finding himself ungratefully forgotten.—And though Moses tells us, that he found favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison, yet the psalmist acquaints us that his sufferings were still grievous, "That his feet were "hurt with fetters," and the iron entered "even into "his soul." And, no doubt, his brethren thought

the sense of their injury must have entered at the same time, and was then rivetted and fixed in his mind forever.

It is natural to imagine they argued and reflected in this manner; and there seems no necessity of seeking for the reason of their uneasiness and distrust in Joseph's conduct, or any other external cause, since the inward workings of their own minds will easily account for the evil they apprehended.—A series of benefits and kindnesses from the man they had injured, gradually heightened the idea of their own guilt, till at length they could not conceive how the trespass could be forgiven them; it appeared with such fresh circumstances of aggravation, that, though they were convinced his resentment slept, yet they thought it only slept, and was likely, some time or other, to awake, and most probably then, that their father was dead, when the consideration of involving him in his revenge had ceased, and all the duty and compassion he owed to the gray hairs and happiness of a parent was discharged and buried with him.

This they express in the consultation held amongst themselves in the words of the text; and, in the following verse, we find them accordingly sending to him to deprecate the evil they dreaded; and either because they thought their father's name more powerful than their own in this application,—or, rather, that they might not commit a fresh injury in seeming to suspect his sincerity, they pretend their father's direction; for we read they sent messengers unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying,—So shall ye say unto Joseph,—"Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass

" of thy brethren and their sin ; for they did unto thee " evil : and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass " of the servants of the God of thy father." The address was not without art, and was conceived in such words as seemed to suggest an argument in their favour,—as if it would not become him, who was but a fellow-servant of their father's God, to harbour revenge, or use the power their father's God had given him against his children. Nor was there a reason in any thing but the fears of a guilty conscience to apprehend it, as appears from the reception the address met with, which was such as bespoke an uncommon goodness of nature ; for, when they thus spake unto him, the historian says he wept. Sympathy for the sorrow and distress of so many sons of his father, now all in his power,—pain at so open and ingenuous a confession of their guilt, —concern and pity for the long punishment they must have endured by so stubborn a remorse, which so many years seemed not to have diminished,—the affecting idea of their condition, which had seemed to reduce them to the necessity of holding up their hands for mercy, when they had lost their protector, —so many tender passions struggling together at once, overcame him ;—he burst into tears ; which spoke what no language could attempt. It will be needless, therefore, to enlarge any further upon this incident, which furnishes us with so beautiful a picture of a compassionate and forgiving temper, that, I think, no words can heighten it ;—but, rather, let us endeavour to find out by what helps and reasoning the patriarch might be supposed to attain to so exalted and engaging a virtue. Perhaps you will say, ' That one so thoroughly convinced, as Joseph

'seemed to be, of the over-ruling providence of 'God, which so evidently makes use of the malice 'and passions of men, and turns them as instru- 'ments in his hands to work his own righteousness, 'and bring about his eternal decrees,—and of which 'his own history was so plain an instance, could not 'have far to seek for an argument to forgiveness, or 'feel much struggle in stifling an inclination against 'it.'—But let any man lay his hand upon his heart, and say, how often, in instances where anger and revenge had seized him, has this doctrine come in to his aid?—In the bitterness of an affront, how often has it calmed his passions, and checked the fury of his resentment!—True, and universally believed as the doctrine is amongst us, it seldom does this service, though so well suited for it, and, like some wise statute, never executed or thought of, though in full force, lies as unheeded as if it was not in being.

'Tis plain 'twas otherwise in the present instance, where Joseph seems to acknowledge the influence it had upon him in his declaration,—'*That* it was 'not they, but God who sent him.' And does not this virtue shine the brightest in such a pious application of the persuasion to so benevolent a purpose?

Without derogating from the merit of his forbearance, he might be supposed to have cast an eye upon the change and uncertainty of human affairs which he had seen himself, and which had convinced him we were all in one another's power by turns, and stand in need of one another's pity and compassion;—and that, to restrain the cruelties and stop the insolence of men's resentments, God has so ordered it in the course of his providence, that very

often in this world,—our revenges return upon our own heads, and men's violent dealings upon their own pates.

And, besides these considerations,—that, in generously forgiving an enemy, he was the truest friend to his own character, and should gain more to it by such an instance of subduing his spirit, than if he had taken a city.—The brave only know how to forgive!—it is the most refined and generous pitch of virtue human nature can arrive at.—* Cowards have done good and kind actions;—cowards have even fought,—nay, sometimes even conquered;—but a coward never forgave!—It is not in his nature;—the power of doing it flows only from a strength and greatness of soul, conscious of its own force and security, and above the little temptations of resenting every fruitless attempt to interrupt its happiness. Moreover, setting aside all considerations of his character in passing by an injury, he was the truest friend likewise to his own happiness and peace of mind; he never felt that fretful storm of passions which hurry men on to acts of revenge,—or suffered those pangs of horror which pursue it. Thus he might possibly argue, and no farther;—for want of a better foundation and better helps, he could raise the building no higher;—to carry it upwards to its perfection, we must call in to our aid that more spiritual and refined doctrine introduced upon it by Christ; namely,—To forgive a brother not only to seven times, but to seventy times seven;—that is, without limitation.

In this the excellency of the gospel is said, by some one, to appear with a remarkable advantage; 'That a christian is as much disposed to love and

* Christian Hero.

'serve you when your enemy, as the mere moral 'man can be, when he is your friend.'—This, no doubt, is the tendency of his religion;—but how often, or in what degrees it succeeds,—how nearly the practice keeps pace with the theory, the all-wise Searcher into the hearts of men, alone is able to determine. But it is to be feared, that such great effects are not so sensibly felt as a speculative man would expect from such powerful motives; and there is many a christian society which would be glad to compound amongst themselves for some lesser degrees of perfection on one hand, were they sure to be exempted, on the other, from the bad effects of those fretful passions which are ever taking, as well as ever giving the occasions of strife; the beginnings of which Solomon aptly compares to the letting out of waters,—the opening a breach which no one can be sure to stop till it has proceeded to the most fatal events.

With justice, therefore, might the son of Sirach conclude, concerning pride,—that secret stream which administers to the overflowings of resentments,—that it was not made for man; nor furious anger for him that is born of a woman. That the one did not become his station:—and that the other was destructive to all the happiness he was intended to receive from it. How miserably then must those men turn tyrants against themselves, as well as others, who grow splenetick and revengeful, not only upon the little unavoidable oppositions and offences they must meet with in the commerce of the world, but upon those which only reach them by report, and accordingly torment their little souls with meditating how to return the injury, before they are

certain they have received one!—Whether this eager sensibility of wrongs and resentment arises from that general cause to which the son of Sirach seems to reduce all fierce anger and passion? or whether to a certain sourness of temper, which stands in every body's way, and therefore subject to be often hurt?—from whichever cause the disorder springs, the advice of the author of the book of Ecclesiasticus is proper:—'Admonish a friend,' says he, 'it may be 'he hath not done it; and if he have, that he do it 'not again. Admonish thy friend, it may be he hath 'not said it; and if he have, that he speak it not 'again. There is that slippeth in his speech, but 'not from his heart: and who is he who hath not 'offended with his tongue?'

I cannot help taking notice here of a certain species of forgiveness, which is seldom enforced or thought of, and yet is no way below our regard: I mean the forgiveness of those, if we may be allowed the expression, whom we have injured ourselves. One would think that the difficulty of forgiving could only rest on the side of him who has received the wrong; but the truth of the fact is often otherwise. The consciousness of having provoked another's resentment often excites the aggressor to keep beforehand with the man he has hurt, and not only to hate him for the evil he expects in return, but even to pursue him down, and put it out of his power to make reprisals.

The baseness of this is such, that it is sufficient to make the same observation which was made upon the crime of parricide among the Grecians:—It was so black,—their legislators did not suppose it could be committed; and, therefore, made no law to punish it.

SERMON XIII.

DUTY OF SETTING BOUNDS TO OUR DESIRES.

2 KINGS IV. 13.

And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care;—what is to be done for thee?—wouldst thou be spoken for to the king, or the captain of the host?—And she answered, I dwell among mine own people.

THE first part of the text is the words which the prophet Elisha puts into the mouth of his servant Gehazi, as a message of thanks to the woman of Shunem for her great kindness and hospitality; of which, after the acknowledgment of his just sense, which Gehazi is bid to deliver in the words,—"Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this "care,"—he directs him to inquire in what manner he may best make a return in discharge of the obligation,—"What shall be done for thee? Wouldst "thou be spoken for to the king, or the captain of "the host?"—The last part of the text is the Shunamite's answer, which implies a refusal of the honour or advantage which the prophet intended to bring upon her by such an application, which she indirectly expresses in her contentment and satisfaction with what she enjoyed in her present station,—"I dwell among mine own people." This instance of self-denial in the Shunamite, is but properly the introduction to her story, and gives rise to

that long and very pathetick transaction which follows,—in the supernatural grant of a child, which God had many years denied her; the affecting loss of him as soon as he was grown up,—and his restoration to life by Elisha, after he had been some time dead; the whole of which, though extremely interesting, and forming such incidents as would afford sufficient matter for instruction, yet, as it will not fall within the intention of this discourse, I shall beg leave at this time barely to consider those previous circumtsances of it, to which the text confines me; upon which I shall enlarge with such reflections as occur, and then proceed to that practical use and exhortation which will naturally fall from it.

We find that, after Elisha had rescued the distressed widow and her two sons from the hands of the creditor, by the miraculous multiplication of her oil,—that he passed on to Shunem, where, we read, was a great woman, and she constrained him to eat bread; and so it was that, as often as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. The sacred historian speaks barely of her temporal condition and station in life,—"That she was a great woman," but describes not the more material part of her (her virtues and character) because they were more evidently to be discovered from the transaction itself; from which it appears, that she was not only wealthy, but likewise charitable, and of a very considerate turn of mind;—for after many repeated invitations and entertainments at her house, finding his occasions called him to a frequent passage that way,—she moves her husband to set up and furnish a lodging for him, with all the conveniences which the simplicity of those times required: "And she said un-

"to her husband, Behold, now I perceive that this "is an holy man of God, which passeth by us con- "tinually, let us make him a little chamber, I pray "thee, on the wall, and let us set for him there a "bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick; "and it shall be when he cometh to us, that he shall "turn in thither."—She perceived he was a holy man;—she had many opportunities, as he passed by them continually, of observing his behaviour and deportment, which she had carefully remarked, and saw plainly what he was:—that the sanctity and simplicity of his manners,—the severity of his life,—his zeal for the religion of his God, and the uncommon fervency of his devotion, when he worshipped before him, which seemed his whole business and employment upon earth,—all bespoke him not a man of this world, but one whose heart and affections were fixed upon another object, which was dearer and more important to him. But as such outward appearances may, and often have been counterfeited, so that the actions of a man are certainly the only interpreters to be relied on, whether such colours are true or false,—so she had heard that all was of a piece there, and that he was throughout consistent; that he had never in any one instance of his life acted as if he had any views in the affairs of this world, in which he had never interested himself at all, but where the glory of his God, or the good and preservation of his fellow-creatures, at first inclined him: that, in a late instance, before he came to Shunem, he had done one of the kindest and most charitable actions that a good man could have done, in assisting the widow and fatherless; and, as the fact was singular, and had just happened

before her knowledge of him, no doubt she had heard the story with all the tender circumstances which a true report would give it in his favour, namely, that a certain woman, whose husband was lately dead, and had left her with her children in a very helpless condition,—very destitute,—and, what was still worse, charged with a debt she was not able to pay;—that her creditor bore exceeding hard upon her, and, finding her little worth in substance, was going to take the advantage which the law allowed of seizing her two sons for his bondsmen; so that she had not only lost her husband, which had made her miserable enough already, but was going to be bereaved of her children, who were the only comfort and support of her life:—that upon her coming to Elisha with this sad story, he was touched with compassion for her misfortunes, and had used all the power and interest which he had with his God to relieve and befriend her, which, in an unheard-of manner, by the miraculous increase of her oil, which was the only substance she had left, he had so bountifully effected, as not only to disentangle her from her difficulties in paying the debt, but withal, what was still more generous, to enable her to live comfortably the remainder of her days. She considered that charity and compassion was so leading a virtue, and had such an influence upon every other part of a man's character, as to be a sufficient proof by itself of the inward disposition and goodness of the heart; but that so engaging an instance of it as this, exercised in so kind and so seasonable a manner, was a demonstration of his,—and that he was in truth what outward circumstances bespoke, a holy man of God.——As the Shunamite's princi-

ple and motive for her hospitality to Elisha was just, as it sprung from an idea of the worth and merit of her guest, so likewise was the manner of doing it kind and considerate. It is observable, she does not solicit her husband to assign him an apartment in her own house,—but to build him a chamber on the wall, apart;—she considered,—that true piety wanted no witnesses, and was always most at ease when most private;—that the tumult and distraction of a large family were not fit for the silent meditations of so holy a man, who would perpetually there meet with something either to interrupt his devotion, or offend the purity of his manners;—that, moreover, under such an independent roof, where he could take shelter as often as his occasions required, she thought he might taste the pleasure which was natural to man in possessing something like what he could call his own,—and, what is no small part of conferring a favour, he would scarce feel the weight of it, or at least much seldomer in this manner than where a daily invitation and repetition of the kindness perpetually put him in mind of his obligation. If any thing could still add to this,—it was that it did not appear to be the dry offer of a faint civility, but that it came directly from the heart. There is a nicety in honest minds, which will not accept of a cold and suspected offer;—and even when it appears to be sincere and truly meant, there is a modesty in true merit which knows not how to accept it; and no doubt she had one, if not both these difficulties to conquer in their turns;—for we read that she constrained him, and in all likelihood forced his acceptance of

it, with all the warmth and friendly openness of a humane and hospitable temper.

It is with benefits as with injuries in this respect, that we do not so much weigh the accidental good or evil they do us, as that which they were designed to do us;—that is, we consider no part of them so much as their intention: and the prophet's behaviour consequent upon this, shews he beheld it through this medium, or in some such advantageous light as I have placed it.

There is no burthen so heavy to a grateful mind, as a debt of kindness unpaid;—and we may believe Elisha felt it so, from the earnest desire which he had, upon the immediate receipt of this, to discharge himself of it; which he expresses in the text in the warmest manner:—"Behold, thou hast been careful for us, with all this care,—what shall be done for thee? Wouldst thou be spoken for to the king, or the captain of the host?"—There is a degree of honest impatience in the words, such as was natural to a good man, who would not be behind-hand with his benefactor.—But there is one thing which may seem strange at first sight, that as her station and condition of life was such, that she appeared rather to have abounded already, than stood in want of any thing in this world which such an application could supply,—why the prophet should not rather have proposed some spiritual advantage, which, as it would better have become the sanctity of his character on the one hand, so, on the other, it would have done a more real and lasting service to his friend.

But we are to reflect, that, in returning favours, we act differently from what we do in conferring

them :—in the one case we simply consider what is best ;—in the other, what is most acceptable. The reason is, that we have a right to act according to our own ideas of what will do the party most good, in the case where we bestow a favour ;—but where we return one, we lose this right, and act according to his conceptions who has obliged us, and endeavour to repay in such a manner as we think it most likely to be accepted in discharge of the obligation. —So that, though we are not to imagine Elisha could be wanting in religious duties, as well as wishes, to so hospitable a friend, we may yet suppose he was directed here by this principle of equity ;—and that in reflecting in what manner he should requite his benefactress, he had considered, that to one of her affluent condition, who had all the reasonable comforts of an independent life,—if there was any passion yet unsatisfied, it must certainly be ambition : that though in general it was an irregular appetite, which, in most cases, 'twas dangerous to gratify, yet in effect 'twas only so far criminal as the power which is acquired was perverted to bad and vitious purposes, which it was not likely to be here, from the specimen she had already given of her disposition, which shewed that if she did wish for an increase of wealth or honour, she wished it only as it would enable her more generously to extend her arm in kind offices, and increase the power as well as the opportunities of doing good.

In justice to Elisha's motive, which must have been good, we must suppose he considered his offer in this light ; and what principally led him to propose it, was the great interest which he had with the king of Israel at that time, which he had merited by

a signal service; and as he had no views for himself, he thought it could not be employed so well as in establishing the fortune of one, whose virtue might be so safely trusted with it. It was a justifiable prepossession in her favour,—though one not always to be relied on; for there is many a one who in a moderate station, and with a lesser degree of power, has behaved with honour and unblemished reputation; and who has even borne the buffetings of adverse fortune well, and manifested great presence and strength of mind under it, whom nevertheless a high exaltation has at once overcome, and so entirely changed, as if the party had left not only his virtue, but even himself behind him.

Whether the Shunamite dreaded to make this dangerous experiment of herself;—or, which is more likely, that she had learned to set bounds to her desires, and was too well satisfied with her present condition to be tempted out of it, she declines the offer in the close of the text:—"I dwell amongst "mine own people;" as if she had said, 'The intend-'ed kindness is far from being small, but it is not 'useful to me; I live here, as thou art a witness, 'in peace, in a contented obscurity;—not so high 'as to provoke envy, nor so low as to be trodden 'down and despised. In this safe and middle state, 'as I have lived amongst my own people, so let me 'die out of the reach both of the cares and glories 'of the world.—'Tis fit, O holy man of God! that 'I learn some time or other to set bounds to my 'desires; and if I cannot fix them now, when I 'have already more than my wants require, when 'shall I hope to do it?—Or how should I expect, 'that even this increase of honour or fortune would

fully satisfy and content my ambition, should I ' now give way to it ?"

So engaging an instance of unaffected moderation and self-denial, deserves well to be considered by the bustlers in this world ;—because, if we are to trust the face and course of things, we scarce see any virtue so hard to be put in practice, and which the generality of mankind seem so unwilling to learn, as this of knowing when they have enough, and when it is time to give over their worldly pursuits. —Aye, but nothing is more easy, you will answer, than to fix this point, and set certain bounds to it.— " For my own part (you will say) I declare I want, and would wish no more, but a sufficient competency of those things which are requisite to the real uses and occasions of life, suitable to have way I have been taught to expect from use and education."—But recollect how seldom it ever happens, when these points are secured, but that new occasions and new necessities present themselves ; and every day as you grow richer, fresh wants are discovered, which rise up before you as you ascend the hill ; so that every step you take,—every accession to your fortune, set your desires one degree farther from rest and satisfaction ;—that something you have not yet grasped, and possibly never shall ; —that devil of a phantom, unpossessed and unpossessable, is perpetually haunting you, and stepping in betwixt you and your contentment.—Unhappy creature !—to think of enjoying that blessing without moderation !—or imagine that so sacred a temple can be raised upon the foundation of wealth or power !—If the ground-work is not laid within your own mind, they will as soon add a cubit to your stature

as to your happiness.—To be convinced it is so,—pray look up to those who have got as high as their warmest wishes could carry them in this ascent:—do you observe they live the better, the longer, the merrier?—or that they sleep the sounder in their beds, for having twice as much as they wanted, or well know how to dispose of?—Of all rules for calculating happiness, this is the most deceitful, and which few but weak minds, and those unpractised in the world too, ever think of applying as the measure in such an estimation.—Great and inexpressible may be the happiness which a moderate fortune and moderate desires, with a consciousness of virtue, will secure. Many are the silent pleasures of the honest peasant, who rises cheerful to his labour:—why should they not?—Look into his house, the seat of each man's happiness;—has he not the same domestick endearments,—the same joy and comfort in his children, and as flattering hopes of their doing well, to enliven his hours and gladden his heart, as you could conceive in the highest station?—And I make no doubt, in general, but if the true state of his joys and sufferings could be fairly balanced with those of his betters, whether any thing would appear at the foot of the account but what would recommend the moral of this discourse.—This, I own, is not to be attained to by the cynical stale trick of haranguing against the goods of fortune;—they were never intended to be talked out of the world.—But as virtue and true wisdom lie in the middle of extremes,—on one hand, not to neglect and despise riches, so as to forget ourselves; and, on the other, not to pursue and love them so as to forget God;—to have them sometimes on our heads,—but always, something more important in our hearts.

SERMON XIV.

SELF-EXAMINATION.

ISAIAH I. 3.

The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib;—but Israel doth not know,—my people doth not consider.

'Tis a severe but an affectionate reproach of the prophet's, laid against the Israelites, which may safely be applied to every heedless and unthankful people, who are neither won by God's mercies, nor terrified by his punishments.—There is a giddy, thoughtless, intemperate spirit gone forth into the world, which possesses the generality of mankind;—and the reason the world is undone is, because the world does not consider,—considers neither awful regard to God,—nor the true relation themselves bear to him. Could they consider this, and learn to weigh the causes, and compare the consequences of things, and to exercise the reason which God has put into us for the government and direction of our lives,—there would be some hopes of a reformation.—But, as the world goes, there is no leisure for such enquiries; and so full are our minds of other matters, that we have not time to ask, nor a heart to answer the questions we ought to put to ourselves.

Whatever our condition is, 'tis good to be acquainted with it in time, to be able to supply what is wanting,—and examine the state of our accounts

before we come to give them up to an impartial judge.

The most inconsiderate see the reasonableness of this,—there being few, I believe, either so thoughtless,—or even so bad,—but that they sometimes enter upon this duty, and have some short intervals of self-examination, which they are forced upon, if from no other motive, yet at least to free themselves from the load and oppression of spirits they must necessarily be subject to without it.—But as the scripture frequently intimates,—and observation confirms its daily,—that there are many mistakes attending the discharge of this duty.—I cannot make the remainder of this discourse more useful, than by a short enquiry into them. I shall therefore, first, beg leave to remind you of some of the many unhappy ways by which we often set about this irksome task of examining our works, without being either the better or the wiser for the employment.

And, first, then let us begin with that which is the foundation of all the other false measures we take in this matter ;—that is, the setting about the examination of our works, before we are prepared with honest dispositions to amend them :—this is beginning the work at the wrong end. These previous dispositions in the heart, are the wheels that should make this work go easily and successfully forwards ; —and to take them off, and procced without them, 'tis no miracle, if, like Pharaoh's chariots, they that drive them,—drive them heavily along.

Besides, if a man is not sincerely inclined to reform his faults,—'tis not likely he should be inclined to see them ;—nor will all the weekly preparations that ever were wrote, bring him nearer the

point :—so that with how serious a face soever he begins to examine,—he no longer does the office of an enquirer,—but an apologist ; whose business is not to search for truth,—but skilfully to hide it.—So long, therefore, as this pre-engagement lasts betwixt the man and his old habits,—there is little prospect of proving his works to any good purpose,—of whatever kind they are, with so strong an interest and power on their side.—As in other trials, so in this, 'tis no wonder if the evidence is puzzled and confounded, and the several facts and circumstances so twisted from their natural shapes, and the whole proof so altered and confirmed on the other side,—as to leave the last state of that man even worse than the first.

A second unhappy, though general, mistake in this great duty of proving our works, is that which the apostle hints at ; in the doing it, not by a direct examination of our own actions, but from a comparative view of them with the lives and actions of other men.

When a man is going to enter upon this work of self-examination,—there is nothing so common as to see him look *round* him,—instead of looking *within* him.—He looks round,—finds out some one who is more malicious,—sees another that is more covetous,—a third that is more proud and imperious than himself ;—and so indirectly forms a judgment of himself, not from a review of his life, and a proving of his own works, as the apostle directs him, but rather from proving the works of others, and from their infirmities and defects, drawing a deceitful conclusion in favour of himself.—In all competitions of this kind,—one may venture to say, there

will be ever so much of self-love in a man, as to draw a flattering likeness of one of the parties ;—and 'tis well,—if he has not so much malignity too, as to give but a coarse picture of the other,—finished with so many hard strokes, as to make the one as unlike its original as the other.

Thus the pharisee, when he entered the temple,—no sooner saw the publican, but that moment he formed the idea to himself of all the vices and corruptions that could possibly enter into the man's character,—and with great dexterity, stated all his own virtues and good qualities over against them. His abstinence and frequent fastings,—exactness in the debts and ceremonies of the law ; not balancing the account as he ought to have done, in this manner :—' What ! though this man is a publican and a sinner, have not I my vices as well as he ? 'Tis true, his particular office exposes him to many temptations of committing extortion and injustice ;—but then,—am not I a devourer of widows' houses, and guilty of one of the most cruel instances of the same crime ? He possibly is a profane person, and may set religion at nought ;—but do not I myself, for a pretence, make long prayers, and bring the greatest of all scandals upon religion, by making it a cloak to my ambitious and worldly views ?—if he, lastly, is debauched and intemperate,—am not I conscious of as corrupt and wanton dispositions ; and that a fair and guarded outside is my best pretence to the opposite character ?'

If a man will examine his works by a comparative view of them with others,—this, no doubt, would be the fairer, and least likely to mislead him.—But as this is seldom the method this trial has gone

through ;—in fact, it generally turns out to be as treacherous and delusive to the man himself, as it is uncandid to the man who is dragged into the comparison ; and whoever judges of himself by this rule,—so long as there is no scarcity of vitious characters in the world,—'tis to be feared he will often take the occasions of triumph and rejoicing, —where, in truth, he ought rather to be sorry and ashamed.

A third error in the manner of proving our works, is what we are guilty of when we leave out of the calculation the only material parts of them ;—I mean, the motives and first principles from whence they proceeded. There is many a fair instance of generosity, chastity, and self-denial, which the world may give a man the credit of ;—which, if he would give himself the leisure to reflect upon, and trace back to their first springs,—he would be conscious, proceeded from such views and intentions as, if known, would not be to his honour.—The truth of this may be made evident by a thousand instances in life :—and yet there is nothing more usual than for a man when he is going upon this duty of self-examination,—instead of calling his own ways to remembrance,—to close the whole enquiry at once, with this short challenge,—" That he defies the world to say ill of him." If the world has no express evidence, this indeed may be an argument of his good luck ; but no satisfactory one of the real goodness and innocence of his life.—A man may be a very bad man,—and yet, through caution,—through deep-laid policy and design, may so guard all outward appearances, as never to want this negative testimony on his side,—' That the world knows no evil

'of him,'—how little soever he deserves it.—Of all assays upon a man's self, this may be said to be the slightest; this method of proving the goodness of our works, differing but little in kind from that unhappy one,—which many unwary people take in proving the goodness of their coin;—who, if it happent to be suspicious,—instead of bringing it either to the balance or the touchstone to try its worth,—they ignorantly go forth, and try if they can pass it upon the world:—if so, all is well, and they are saved all the expense and pains of enquiring after and detecting the cheat.

A fourth error in this duty of examination of men's works is, that of committing the task to others:—an error into which thousands of well-meaning creatures are ensnared in the Romish church by her doctrines of auricular confession, of works of supererogation, and the many lucrative practices raised upon that capital stock:—the trade of which is carried to such a height in popish countries, that if you was at Rome or Naples now, and was disposed, in compliance with the apostle's exhortation in the text, to set about this duty, to prove your *own* works,—'tis great odds whether you would be suffered to do it yourself, without interruption: and you might be said to have escaped well, if the first person you consulted upon it did not talk you out of your resolution, and possibly your senses too at at the same time.—Prove your works!—For heaven's sake, desist from so rash an undertaking!—What!—trust your own skill and judgment in a matter of so much difficulty and importance,—when there are so many whose business it is,—who understand it so well,—and who can do it for you with so much safety and advantage!

If your works must be proved, you would be advised by all means to send them to undergo this operation with some one who knows what he is about; either some expert and noted confessor of the church,—or to some convent,—or religious society, who are in possession of a large stock of good works of all kinds, wrought up by saints and confessors, where you may suit yourself,—and either get the defects of your own supplied,—or be accommodated with new ones ready proved to your hands, sealed, and certified to be so by the Pope's commissary and the notaries of his ecclesiastick court. There needs little more to lay open this fatal error,—than barely to represent it: so I shall only add a short remark,—That they who are persuaded to be thus virtuous by proxy, and will prove the goodness of their works only by deputies,—will have no reason to complain against God's justice,—if he suffers them to go to heaven only in the same manner;—that is,—by deputies too.

The last mistake which I shall have time to mention is, that which the Methodists have revived, for 'tis no new error,—but one which has misled thousands before these days, wherever enthusiasm had got footing;—and that is,—the attempting to prove their works by that very argument which is the greatest proof of their weakness and superstition;—I mean that extraordinary impulse and intercourse with the Spirit of God which they pretend to, and whose operations (if you trust them) are so sensibly felt in their hearts and souls, as to render at once all other proofs of their works needless to themselves.—This, I own, is one of the most summary ways of proceeding in this duty of self-exam-

ination; and, as it proves a man's works in the gross, it saves him a world of sober thought and inquiry after many vexatious particulars.

Indeed, if the premises were true,—the inference is direct;—for when a man dreams of these inward workings,—and wakes with the impression of them strong upon his brain, 'tis not strange he should think himself a chosen vessel,—sanctified within, and sealed up unto the perfect day of redemption; and so long as such a one is led captive by this error,—there is nothing in nature to induce him to this duty of examining his own works in the sense of the prophet:—for however bad they are,—so long as his credulity and enthusiasm equal them, 'tis impossible they should disturb his conscience, or frighten him into a reformation. These are some of the unhappy mistakes in the many methods this work is set about,—which, in a great measure, rob us of the fruits we expected,—and sometimes so entirely blast them, that we are neither the better nor wiser for all the pains we have taken.

There are many other false steps which lead us the same way;—but the delineation of these, however, may serve at present, not only as so many land-marks to guard us from this dangerous coast which I have described, but to direct us likewise into that safe one, where we can only expect the reward the Gospel promises;—for if, according to the first recited causes, a man fails in examining his works, from a disinclination to reform them,—from partiality of comparisons,—from flattery to his own motives, and a vain dependence upon the opinion of the world,—the conclusion is unavoidable,—that he must search for the qualities the most opposite to

these for his conductors ;—and if he hopes to discharge this work so as to have advantage from it, —that he must set out upon the principles of an honest head, willing to reform itself, and attached principally to that object, without regard to the spiritual condition of others, or the misguided opinions which the world may have of himself.

That for this end,—he must call his own ways to remembrance, and search out his spirit,—search his actions with the same critical exactness and same piercing curiosity we are wont to sit in judgment upon others ;—varnishing nothing,—and disguising nothing. If he proceeds thus, and in every relation of life takes a full view of himself without prejudice ;—traces his actions to their principles without mercy, and looks into the dark corners and recesses of his heart without fear, and, if upon such an enquiry he acts consistent with his view in it, by reforming his errors, separating the dross, and purifying the whole mass with repentance,—this will bid fair for examining a man's works in the apostle's sense :—and whoever discharges the duty thus, with a view to scripture, which is the rule in this case,—and to reason, which is the applier of this rule in all cases,—need not fear but he will have what the prophet calls "rejoicing in himself,"—and that he will lay the foundation of his peace and comfort where it ought to lie ;—that is, within himself,—in the testimony of a good conscience, and the joyful expectation that, having done his utmost to examine his *own* works here, God will accept them hereafter, through the merits of Christ ; which God grant ! Amen.

SERMON XV.

JOB'S EXPOSTULATION WITH HIS WIFE.

JOB II. 10.

What!—Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil also?

These are the words of Job, uttered in the depth of his misfortunes, by way of reproof to his wife, for the counsel we find she had given him in the foregoing verse; namely, Not to retain his integrity any longer,—but to "curse God and die." Though it is not very evident what was particularly meant and implied in the words,—"Curse God and die,"—yet it is certain, from Job's reply to them, that they directed him to some step which was rash and unwarrantable; and, probably, as it is generally explained, meant that he should openly call God's justice to an account, and, by a blasphemous accusation of it, provoke God to destroy his being: as if she had said,—"After so many sad things which have befallen thee,—notwithstanding thy integrity,—what gainest thou by serving God, seeing he bears thus hard upon thee, as though thou wast his enemy?—Ought so faithful a servant as thou hast been, to receive so much unkind treatment at his hands,—and tamely to submit to it?—patiently to sustain the evils he has brought upon thy house, and, neither murmur with thy lips, nor charge him with injustice?—Bear it not thus;—and as thy piety could not

at first protect thee from such misfortunes,—nor thy behaviour under them could since move God to take pity on thee,—change thy conduct towards him,—boldly expostulate with him,—upbraid him openly with unkindness,—call his justice and providence to an account for oppressing thee in so undeserved a manner, and get that benefit by provoking him, which thou hast not been able to obtain by serving him,—to die at once by his hands, and be freed at least from the greater misery of a lingering and more tormenting death."

On the other hand, some interpreters tell us,—that the word *curse*, in the original, is equivocal, and does more literally signify here, to bless than to blaspheme; and consequently, that the whole is rather to be considered as a sarcastical scoff at Job's piety;—as if it had been said,—"Go to, bless God, and die;—since thou art so ready to praise him in troubles as thou hast done, go on in thy own way, and see how God will reward thee by a miserable death, which thou canst not avoid."

Without disputing the merit of these two interpretations, it may not seem an improbable conjecture, that the words imply something still different from what is expressed in either of them;—and, instead of supposing them as an incitement to blaspheme God,—which was madness,—or that they were intended as an insult, which was unnatural,—that her advice to curse God and die, was meant here, that he should resolve upon a voluntary death himself, which was an act not only in his own power, but what carried some appearance of a remedy with it, and promised, at least at first sight, some respite

from pain, as it would put an end both to his life and his misfortunes together.

One may suppose that, with all the concern and affection which was natural, she beheld her lord afflicted both with poverty and sickness;—by one sudden blow, brought down from his palace to the dunghill:—in one mournful day she saw that not only the fortunes of his house were blasted, but likewise the hopes of his posterity cut off forever by the untimely loss of his children.—She knew he was a virtuous and an upright man, and deserved a better fate;—her heart bled the more for him;—she saw the prospect before him was dreadful;—that there appeared no possible means which could retrieve the sad situation of his affairs;—that death,—the last, the surest friend to the unfortunate,—could only set him free;—and that it was better to resolve upon that at once, than vainly endeavour to wade through such a sea of troubles, which, in the end, would overwhelm him. We may suppose her spirits sinking under those apprehensions, when she began to look upon his constancy as a fruitless virtue, and, from that persuasion, to have said unto him,—Curse God,—depend no longer upon him, nor wait the issues of his providence, which has already forsaken thee:—as there is no help from that quarter, resolve to extricate thyself;—and, since thou hast met with no justice in this world,—leave it,—die,—and force thy passage into a better country, where misfortunes cannot follow thee.

Whether this paraphrase upon the words is just, or the former interpretations be admitted, the reply in the text is equally proper;—What!—Shall we receive good at the hands of God, and shall we not

receive evil also? Are not both alike the dispensations of an all-wise and good Being, who knows and determines what *is best?* and wherefore should I make myself the judge, to receive the one, and yet be so partial as to reject the other, when, by fairly putting both into the scale, I may be convinced how much the good outweighs the evil in all cases? In my own, consider how strong this argument is against me.

In the beginning of my days, how did God crown me with honour! In how remarkable a manner did his providence set a hedge about me, and about all that I had on every side!—how he prospered the works of my hands, so that our substance and happiness increased every day!

And now, when, for reasons best known to his infinite wisdom, he has thought fit to try me with afflictions,—shall I rebel against him, in sinning with my lips, and charging him foolishly?—God forbid!—O, rather, may I look up towards that hand which has bruised me,—for he maketh sore, and he bindeth up; he woundeth, and his hands make whole. From his bounty only has issued all I had; from his wisdom—all I have lost; for he giveth, and he hath taken away: blessed be his name!

There are few instances of particular virtue more engaging than those of this heroick cast; and, if we take the testimony of a heathen philosopher upon it, there is not an object in this world which God can be supposed to look down upon with greater pleasure than that of a good man involved in misfortunes, surrounded on all sides with difficulties,—yet cheerfully bearing up his head, and struggling against them with firmness and constancy of mind.

—Certainly, to our conceptions, such objects must be truly engaging :—and the reason of so exalted an encomium from this hand is easily to be guessed: no doubt, the wisest of the heathen philosophers had found, from observation upon the life of man, that the many troubles and infirmities of his nature, the sicknesses, disappointments, sorrows for the loss of children or property, with the numberless other calamities and cross accidents to which the life of man is subject, were in themselves so *great* ;—and so *little* solid comfort to be administered from the mere refinements of philosophy in such emergencies, that there was no virtue which required greater efforts, or which was found so difficult to be achieved upon moral principles,—upon moral principles, which had no foundation to sustain this great weight which the infirmities of our nature laid upon it :—and, for this reason, 'tis observable, that there is no subject, upon which the moral writers of antiquity have exhausted so much of their eloquence, or where they have spent such time and pains, as in this of endeavouring to reconcile men to these evils ; insomuch, that from thence, in most modern languages, the patient enduring of affliction has, by degrees, obtained the name of philosopher, and almost monopolized the word to itself, as if it was the chief end or compendium of all the wisdom which philosophy had to offer. And indeed, considering what lights they had, some of them wrote exceedingly well ; yet, as what they said proceeded more from the head than the heart, 'twas generally more calculated to silence a man in his troubles, than to convince and teach him how to bear them ; and, therefore, however subtle and ingenious their argu-

ments might appear in the reading, 'tis to be feared they lost much of their efficacy when tried in the application. If a man was thrust back in the world by disappointments, or, as was Job's case, had suffered a sudden change in his fortunes, from an affluent condition was brought down by a train of cruel accidents, and pinched with poverty,—philosophy would come in, and exhort him to stand his ground; —it would tell him, that the same greatness and strength of mind which enabled him to behave well in the days of his prosperity, should equally enable him to behave well in the days of his adversity;—that it was the property of only weak and base spirits, who were insolent in the one, to be dejected and overthrown by the other; whereas, great and generous souls were at all times calm and equal: as they enjoyed the advantages of life with indifference, they were able to resign them with the same temper,—and, consequently, were out of the reach of fortune. All which, however fine, and likely to satisfy the fancy of a man at ease, could convey but little consolation to a heart already pierced with sorrow;—nor is it to be conceived how an unfortunate creature should any more receive relief from such a lecture, however just, than a man racked with an acute fit of the gout or stone, could be supposed to be set free from torture by hearing from his physician a nice dissertation upon his case. The philosophick consolations in sickness, or in afflictions for the death of friends and kindred, were just as efficacious;—and were rather, in general, to be considered as good sayings than good remedies;—so that, if a man was bereaved of a promised child, in whom all his hopes and expectations centered,—or

a wife was left destitute to mourn the loss and protection of a kind and tender husband, Seneca or Epictetus would tell the pensive parent and disconsolate widow,—that tears and lamentations for the dead were fruitless and absurd!—that to die was the necessary and unavoidable debt of nature;—and, as it could admit of no remedy,—'twas impious and foolish to grieve and fret themselves upon it. Upon such sage counsel, as well as many other lessons of the same stamp, the same reflection might be applied, which is said to have been made by one of the Roman emperors to one who administered the same consolations to him on a like occasion;—to whom, advising him to be comforted, and make himself easy, since the event had been brought about by fatality, and could not be helped,—he replied,—'That 'this was so far from lessening his trouble,—that it 'was the very circumstance which occasioned it.' —So that, upon the whole, when the true value of these, and many more of their current arguments, have been weighed and brought to the test,—one is led to doubt whether the greatest part of their heroes, the most renowned for constancy, were not much more indebted to good nerves and spirits, or the natural happy frame of their tempers, for behaving well, than to any extraordinary helps which they could be supposed to receive from their instructors: and, therefore, I should make no scruple to assert, that one such instance of patience and resignation as this, which the scripture gives us in the person of Job, not of one most pompously declaiming upon the contempt of pain and poverty, but of a man sunk in the lowest condition of humanity, to behold him when stripped of his estate,—his

wealth, his friends, his children,—cheerfully holding up his head, and entertaining his hard fortune with firmness and serenity,—and this, not from a stoical stupidity, but a just sense of God's providence, and a persuasion of his justice and goodness in all his dealings;—such an example, I say, as this, is of more universal use, speaks truer to the heart, than all the heroick precepts which the pedantry of philosophy has to offer.

This leads me to the point I aim at in this discourse, namely, that there are no principles but those of religion to be depended on in cases of real distress; and that these are able to encounter the the worst emergencies; and to bear us up under all the changes and chances to which our life is subject.

Consider then what virtue the very first principle of religion has, and how wonderfully it is conducive to this end. That there is a God, a powerful, a wise, a good Being, who first made the world, and continues to govern it;—by whose goodness all things are designed,—and by whose providence all things are conducted, to bring about the greatest and best ends. The sorrowful and pensive wretch that was giving way to his misfortunes, and mournfully sinking under them, the moment this doctrine comes in to his aid, hushes all his complaints,—and thus speaks comfort to his soul:—'It is the Lord,—let 'him do what seemeth him good;'—without his direction, I know that no evil can befall me,—without his permission, that no power can hurt me.—It is impossible a Being so wise should mistake my happiness,—or that a Being so good should contradict it. If he has denied me riches or other advan-

tages,—perhaps he foresees the gratifying my wishes would undo me, and, by my own abuse of them, be perverted to my ruin.—If he has denied me the request of children,—or, in his providence, has thought fit to take them from me,—how can I say —whether he has not dealt kindly with me, and only taken that away which he foresaw would embitter and shorten my days ? It does so to thousands, where the disobedience of a thankless child has brought down the parents gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. Has he visited me with sickness, poverty, or other disappointments ?—can I say, but these are blessings in disguise ?—so many different expressions of his care and concern to disentangle my thoughts from this world, and fix them upon another,—another, a better world beyond this !— This thought opens a new scene of hope and consolation to the unfortunate ;—and, as the persuasion of a providence reconciles him to the evils he has suffered,—this prospect of a future life gives him strength to despise them, and esteem the light afflictions of his life as they are,—not worthy to be compared to what is reserved for him hereafter.

Things are great or small by comparison,—and he who looks no farther than this world, and balances the accounts of his joys and sufferings from that consideration, finds all his sorrows enlarged, and, at the close of them, will be apt to look back, and cast the same sad reflection upon the whole which the patriarch did Pharaoh,—"That few and evil had "been the days of his pilgrimage." But let him lift up his eyes towards heaven, and steadfastly behold the life and immortality of a future state ;—he then wipes away all tears from off his eyes forever

and ever ;—like the exiled captive, big with the hopes that he is returning home,—he feels not the weight of his chains, nor counts the days of his captivity, but looks forward with rapture towards the country where his heart is fled before him.

These are the aids which religion offers us towards the regulating of our spirit under the evils of life ;—but, like great cordials, they are seldom used but on great occurrences.—In the lesser evils of life we seem to stand unguarded, and our peace and contentment are overthrown, and our happiness broke in upon by a little impatience of spirit, under the cross and untoward accidents we meet with.—These stand unprovided for, and we neglect them as we do the slighter indispositions of the body,—which we think not worth treating seriously,—and so leave them to nature. In good habits of the body, this may do ;—and I would gladly believe there are such good habits of the temper ; such a complexional ease and health of heart, as may often save the patient much medicine.—We are still to consider,—that however such good frames of mind are got,—they are worth preserving by all rules : —patience and contentment,—which like the treasure hid in the field, for which a man sold all he had to purchase,—is of that price that it cannot be had at too great a purchase, since, without it, the best condition in life cannot make us happy ;—and, with it, it is impossible we should be miserable, even in the worst.—Give me leave, therefore, to close this discourse with some reflections upon the subject of a contented mind,—and the duty in man of regulating his spirit, in our way through life ;—a subject in every body's mouth,—preached upon daily to our

friends and kindred,—but too oft in such a style, as to convince the party lectured only of this truth,—That we bear the misfortunes of others with excellent tranquillity.

I believe there are thousands so extravagant in their ideas of contentment, as to imagine that it must consist in having every thing in this world turn out the way they wish ;—that they are to sit down in happiness, and feel themselves so at ease in all points, as to desire nothing better, and nothing more. I own there are instances of some, who seem to pass through the world as if all their paths had been strewed with rose-buds of delight ;—but a little experience will convince us, 'tis a fatal expectation to go upon.—We are born to trouble ; and we may depend upon it, whilst we live in this world, we shall have it, though with intermissions ;—that is, in whatever state we are, we shall find a mixture of good and evil ; and, therefore, the true way to contentment is to know how to receive these certain vicissitudes of life,—the returns of good and evil, so as neither to be exalted by the one, or overthrown by the other, but to bear ourselves towards every thing which happens, with such ease and indifference of mind as to hazard as little as may be. This is the true temperate climate fitted for us by nature, and in which every wise man would wish to live.—God knows, we are perpetually straying out of it ; and, by giving wings to our imaginations in the transports we dream of, from such or such a situation in life, we are carried away alternately into all the streams of hot and cold, for which, as we are neither fitted by nature, nor prepared by expectation, we feel them with all their violence, and with all their danger too.

God, for wise reasons, has made our affairs in this world almost as fickle and capricious as ourselves ;—pain and pleasure, like light and darkness, succeed each other ; and he that knows how to accommodate himself to their periodical returns, and can wisely extract the good from the evil,—knows only how to live :—this is true contentment, at least all that is to be had of it in this world ; and for this every man must be indebted, not to his fortune, but to himself.—And, indeed, it would have been strange, if a duty so becoming us as dependent creatures,—and so necessary, besides, to all our well-beings, had been placed out of the reach of any in some measure to put in practice ;—and, for this reason, there is scarce any lot so low, but there is something in it to satisfy the man whom it has befallen ; Providence having so ordered things, that in every man's cup, how bitter soever, there are some cordial drops,—some good circumstances, which, if wisely extracted, are sufficient for the purpose he wants them,—that is, to make him contented, and, if not happy, at least resigned. May God bless us all with this spirit, for the sake of Jesus Christ ! Amen.

SERMON XVI.

THE CHARACTER OF SHIMEI.

2 SAMUEL XIX. 21. 1ST PART.

But Abishai said, Shall not Shimei be put to death for this?

——It has not a good aspect.—This is the second time Abishai has proposed Shimei's destruction; once in the 16th chapter, on a sudden transport of indignation, when Shimei cursed David.—"Why should this dead dog, cried Abishai, curse 'my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, "and cut off his head."—This had something at least of gallantry in it; for, in doing it, he hazarded his own; and, besides, the offender was not otherwise to be come at. The second time is in the text, when the offender was absolutely in their power,—when the blood was cool, and the suppliant was holding up his hands for mercy.

——Shall not Shimei, answered Abishai, be put to death for this? So unrelenting a pursuit looks less like justice than revenge, which is so cowardly a passion, that it renders Abishai's first instance almost inconsistent with the second. I shall not endeavour to reconcile them, but confine the discourse simply to Shimei, and make such reflections upon his character as may be of use to society.

Upon the news of his son Absalom's conspiracy, David had fled from Jerusalem, and from his own house, for safety: the representation given of the

manner of it is truly affecting :—never was a scene of sorrow so full of distress!

The king fled with all his household, to save himself from the sword of the man he loved; he fled with all the marks of humble sorrow,—"with his head "covered and barefoot;" and as he went by the ascent of mount Olivet, the sacred historian says he wept:—some gladsome scenes, perhaps, which there had pass'd,—some hours of festivity he had shared with Absalom in better days, pressed tenderly upon nature;—he wept at this sad vicissitude of things;—and all the people that were with him, smitten with his affliction, "covered each man his head,—"weeping as he went up."

It was on this occasion, when David had got to Bahurim, that Shimei the son of Gera, as we read in the 5th verse, came out.—Was it with the choicest oils he could gather from mount Olivet, to pour into his wounds?—Times and troubles had not done enough; and thou camest out, Shimei, to add thy portion!——

"And as he came, he cursed David, and threw "stones and cast dust at him; and thus said Shimei, "when he cursed: Go to, thou man of Belial, thou "hast sought blood,—and behold thou art caught in "thy own mischief; for now hath the Lord return-"ed upon thee all the blood of Saul and his house."

There is no small degree of malicious craft in fixing upon a season to give a mark of enmity and ill-will: a word,—a look, which at one time would make no impression, at another time wounds the heart, and, like a shaft flying with the wind, pierces deep, which, with its own natural force, would scarce have reached the object aimed at.

This seemed to have been Shimei's hopes; but excess of malice makes men too quick-sighted even for their own purpose. Could Shimei possibly have waited for the ebb of David's passions, and till the first great conflict within him had been over,—then the reproach of being guilty of Saul's blood must have hurt him:—his heart was possessed with other feelings,—it bled for the deadly sting which Absalom had given him;—he felt not the indignity of a stranger:—"Behold, my son Absalom, who came "out of my bowels, seeketh my life!—how much "more may Shimei do it!—let him alone; it may "be the Lord may look upon my affliction, and re- "quite me good for this evil."

An injury unanswered, in course, grows weary of itself, and dies away in a voluntary remorse.

In bad dispositions, capable of no restraint but fear,—it has a different effect;—the silent digestion of one wrong provokes a second.—He pursues him with the same invective:—"and as David and his "men went by the way, Shimei went along on the "hill's side over against him; and cursed as he "went, and cast dust at him."

The insolence of base minds in success is boundless, and would scarce admit of a comparison, did not they themselves furnish us with one, in the degrees of their abjection, when evil returns upon them:—the same poor heart which excites ungenerous tempers to triumph over a fallen adversary, in some instances, seems to exalt them above the point of courage, sinks them, in others, even below cowardice:—not unlike some little particles of matter struck off from the surface of the dirt by sunshine,—dance and sport there whilst it lasts,—

but the moment 'tis withdrawn,—they fall down ;—for dust they are,—and unto dust they will return ;—whilst firmer and larger bodies preserve the stations which nature has assigned them, subjected to laws which no change of weather can alter.

This last did not seem to be Shimei's case : in all David's prosperity, there is no mention made of him ;—he thrust himself forward into the circle, and, possibly, was number'd amongst friends and well-wishers.

When the scene changes, and David's troubles force him to leave his house in despair,—Shimei is the first man we hear of who comes out against him.

The wheel turns round once more ; Absalom is cast down, and David returns in peace :—Shimei suits his behaviour to the occasion, and is the first man also who hastes to greet him ;—and, had the wheel turn'd round a hundred times, Shimei, I dare say, in every period of its rotation, would have been uppermost.

O Shimei ! would to heaven, when thou wast slain, that all thy family had been slain with thee, and not one of thy resemblance left ! but ye have multiplied exceedingly, and replenished the earth ; and, if I prophesy rightly,—ye will in the end *subdue* it !

There is not a character in the world which has so bad an influence upon the affairs of it, as this of Shimei. Whilst power meets with honest checks, and the evils of life with honest refuge, the world will never be undone : but thou, Shimei, hast sapp'd it at both extremes ; for thou corruptest prosperity,—and 'tis thou who hast broken the heart of poverty ; and, so long as worthless spirits can be ambi-

tious ones, 'tis a character we shall never want. O! it infests the court,—the camp,—the cabinet!—it infests the church!—go where you will,—in every quarter, in every profession, you see a Shimei following the wheels of the fortunate through thick mire and clay!—

—Haste, Shimei!—haste, or thou wilt be undone forever.—Shimei girdeth up his loins and speedeth after him.—Behold the hand which governs every thing,—takes the wheels from off his chariot, so that he who driveth, driveth on heavily.—Shimei doubles his speed,—but 'tis the contrary way; he flies like the wind over a sandy desert, and the place thereof shall know it no more:—stay, Shimei! 'tis your patron,—your friend,—your benefactor; 'tis the man who has raised you from the dunghill!—'Tis all one to Shimei: Shimei is the barometer of every man's fortune; marks the rise and fall of it, with all the variations from scorching hot to freezing cold upon his countenance, that the smile will admit of.—Is a cloud upon thy affairs?—see,—it hangs over Shimei's brow.—Hast thou been spoken for to the king or the captain of the host without success?—Look not into the court-calendar;—the vacancy is filled up in Shimei's face.—Art thou in debt?—though not to Shimei,—no matter;—the worst officer of the law shall not be more insolent.

What then, Shimei, is the guilt of poverty so black,—is it of so general a concern, that thou and all thy family must rise up as one man to reproach it?—when it lost every thing,—did it lose the right to pity too? or did he who maketh poor as well as maketh rich, strip it of its natural powers to mollify

the hearts and supple the temper of your race?—Trust me, ye have much to answer for; it is this treatment which it has ever met with from spirits like yours, which has gradually taught the world to look upon it as the greatest of evils, and shun it as the worst disgrace;—and what is it, I beseech you;—what is it that man will not do to keep clear of so sore an imputation and punishment?—is it not to fly from this that "he rises early,—late takes rest, "—and eats the bread of carefulness?"—that he plots, contrives,—swears,—lies,—shuffles,—puts on all shapes,—tries all garments,—wears them with this or that side outward,—just as it favours his escape?

They who have considered our nature affirm, that shame and disgrace are two of the most insupportable evils of human life: the courage and spirits of many have mastered other misfortunes, and borne themselves up against them; but the wisest and best of souls have not been a match for these; and we have many a tragical instance on record, what greater evils have been run into, merely to avoid this one.

Without this tax of infamy, poverty, with all the burdens it lays upon our flesh,—so long as it is virtuous, could never break the spirits of a man; all its hunger, and pain, and nakedness, are nothing to it; they have some counterpoise of good: and besides, they are directed by Providence, and must be submitted to: but these are afflictions not from the hand of God, or nature;—"for they do come forth "of the dust," and most properly may be said "to "spring out of the ground;" and this is the reason they lay such stress upon our patience,—and in the

end, create such a distrust of the world, as makes us look up,—and pray, "Let me fall into thy hands, "O God! but let me not fall into the hands of men."

Agreeable to this was the advice of Eliphaz to Job in the day of his distress:—"acquaint thyself "(said he) now with God."—Indeed his poverty seemed to have left him no other friends; the swords of the Sabeans had frightened them away,—all but a few; and of what kind they were, the very proverb, of *Job's comforters*,—says enough.

It is an instance which gives one great concern for human nature, that a man, "who always wept "for him who was in trouble;—who never saw any "perish for want of clothing;—who never suffered "the stranger to lodge in the street, but opened his "door to the traveller;"—that a man of so good a character,—"That he never caused the eyes of the "widow to fail,—or had eaten his morsel by him-"self alone, and the fatherless had not eaten there-"of;"—that such a man, the moment he fell into poverty, should have occasion to cry out for quarter,—"Have mercy upon me, O my friends! for "the hand of God has touched me."—Gentleness and humanity, one would think, would melt the hardest heart, and charm the fiercest spirit; bind up the most violent hand, and still the most abusive tongue;—but the experiment failed in a stronger instance of him, whose meat and drink it was to do us good; and in pursuit of which, whose whole life was a continued scene of kindness and of insults, for which we must go back to the same explanation with which we set out,—and that is, the scandal of poverty.—

"This fellow, we know not whence he is,"—was the popular cry of one part; and with those who

seemed to know better, the query did not lessen the disgrace.—Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary ?—of Mary ! great God of Israel ! What !—of the meanest of thy people ! " for he had not re- " garded the low estate of his hand-maiden,"—and of the poorest, too ! for she had not a lamb to offer, but was purified, as Moses directed in such a case, by the oblation of a turtle dove.

That the Saviour of their nation could be poor, and not have where to lay his head,—was a crime never to be forgiven : and though the purity of his doctrine, and the works which he had done in its support, were stronger arguments on its side, than his humiliation could be against it,—yet the offence still remained ;—they looked for the redemption of Israel ; but they would have it only in those dreams of power which filled their imagination.—

Ye who weigh the worth of all things only in the goldsmith's balance,—was this religion for you ?—a religion whose appearance was not great and splendid,—but looked thin and meagre, and whose principles and promises shewed more like the curses of the law than its blessings :—for they called for sufferings, and promised little but persecutions.

In truth, it is not easy for tribulation or distress, for nakedness or famine, to make many converts out of pride ; or reconcile a worldly heart to the scorn and reproaches which were sure to be the portion of every one who believed a mystery so discredited by the world, and so unpalatable to all its passions and pleasures.

But, to bring this sermon to its proper conclusion :—

If Astrea or Justice never finally took her leave of the world till the day that poverty first became ridiculous, it is matter of consolation, that the God of justice is ever over us :—that whatever outrages the lowness of our condition may be exposed to from a mean and undiscerning world,—that we walk in the presence of the greatest and most generous of Beings, who is infinitely removed from cruelty and straitness of mind, and all those little and illiberal passions with which we hourly insult each other.

The worst part of mankind are not always to be conquered ;—but if they are,—'tis by the imitation of these qualities which must do it :—'tis true,—as I've shewn,—they may fail ; but still all is not lost, —for if we conquer not the world,—in the very attempts to do it, we shall at least conquer ourselves, and lay the foundation of our peace (where it ought to be) within our own hearts.

SERMON XVII.

THE CASE OF HEZEKIAH AND THE MESSENGERS.*

2 KINGS XX. 15.

And he said, What have they seen in thine house? and Hezekiah answered, All the things that are in my house have they seen; there is nothing amongst all my treasures that I have not shewn them.

——And where was the harm, you'll say, in all this?

'An eastern prince, the son of Baladine, had sent 'messengers with presents as far as from Babylon, 'to congratulate Hezekiah upon the recovery from 'his sickness; and Hezekiah, who was a good 'prince, acted consistently with himself; "he re-"ceived and entertained the men, and hearkened "unto them;" and before he sent them away, he 'courteously shewed them all that was worth a 'stranger's curiosity in his house and his king-'dom;—and in this, seemed only to have discharg-'ed himself of what urbanity or the etiquette of 'courts might require.' Notwithstanding this, in the verse which immediately follows the text, we find he had done amiss; and as a punishment for it, that all his riches, which his forefathers had laid up in store unto that day, were threatened to be carri-

* Preached before his Excellency the Earl of Hertford, at Paris, 1763.

ed away in triumph to Babylon:—the very place from whence the messengers had come.

A hard return! and what his behaviour does not seem to have deserved. To set this matter in a clear light, it will be necessary to enlarge upon the whole story;—the reflections, which will arise out of it, as we go along, may help us;—at least, I hope they will be of use on their own account.

After the miraculous defeat of the Assyrians, we read in the beginning of this chapter, that Hezekiah was sick even unto death; and that God sends the prophet Isaiah, with the unwelcome message, "That he should set his house in order; for that "he should die, and not live."

There are many instances of men, who have received such news with the greatest ease of mind, and even entertained the thoughts of it with smiles upon their countenances;—and this, either from strength of spirits and the natural cheerfulness of their temper,—or that they knew the world, and cared not for it,—or expected a better;—yet thousands of good men, with all the helps of philosophy, and against all the assurances of a well-spent life, that the change must be to their account,—upon the approach of death have still leaned towards this world, and wanted spirits and resolution to bear the shock of a separation from it forever.

This, in some measure, seemed to have been Hezekiah's case; for though he had walked before God in truth, and with a perfect heart, and had done that which was good in his sight,—yet we find that the hasty summons afflicted him greatly;—that upon the delivery of the message he wept sore;—that he turned his face towards the wall,—perhaps

for the greater secrecy of his devotion, and that, by withdrawing himself thus from all external objects, he might offer up his prayer unto his God with greater and more fervent attention.

—And he prayed, and said, O Lord! I beseech thee remember!——O Hezekiah! How couldst thou fear that God had forgotten thee! or, how couldst thou doubt of his remembrance of thy integrity, when he called thee to receive its recompense!

But here it appears of what materials man is made. He pursues happiness;—and yet is so content with misery, that he would wander forever in this dark vale of it,—and say, "It is good, Lord, to "be here, and to build tabernacles of rest!" and so long as we are clothed with flesh, and nature has so great a share within us, it is no wonder if that part claims its right, and pleads for the sweetness of life, notwithstanding all its cares and disappointments.

This natural weakness, no doubt, had its weight in Hezekiah's earnest prayer for life; and yet, from the success it met with, and the immediate change of God's purpose thereupon, it is hard to imagine, but that it must have been accompanied with some meritorious and more generous motive; and if we suppose, as some have done, that he turned his face towards the wall, because that part of his chamber looked towards the temple, the care of whose preservation lay next his heart, we may consistently enough give this sense to his prayer:

'O God! remember how I have walked before 'thee in truth;—how much I have done to rescue 'thy religion from error and falsehood;—thou know-

'est that the eyes of the world are fixed upon me,
'as one that hath forsaken their idolatry, and re-
'stored thy worship;—that I stand in the midst of
'a crooked and corrupt generation, which looks
'through all my actions, and watches all events
'which happen to me: if now they shall see me
'snatched away in the midst of my days and ser-
'vice, how will thy great name suffer in my extinc-
'tion! Will not the heathen say, This is to serve
'the God of Israel!—How faithfully did Hezekiah
'walk before him!—What enemies did he bring
'upon himself, in too warmly promoting his wor-
'ship! and now when the hour of sickness and dis-
'tress came upon him, and he most wanted the aid
'of his God,—behold how he was forsaken!'

It is not unreasonable to ascribe some such pious and more disinterested motive to Hezekiah's desire of life, from the issue and success of his prayer. —"For it came to pass, before Isaiah had gone out "into the middle court, that the word of the Lord "came to him, saying, Turn again, and tell Heze- "kiah I have heard his prayer, I have seen his "tears; and behold I will heal him."

It was upon this occasion, as we read in the 12th verse of this chapter, that Berodach-baladan, son of Baladan king of Babylon, sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah: he had heard the fame of his sickness and recovery; for as the Chaldeans were great searchers into the secrets of nature, especially into the motions of the celestial bodies, in all probability they had taken notice, at that distance, of the strange appearance of the shadow's returning ten degrees backwards upon their dials, and had inquired and learned upon what account, and in whose favour,

such a sign was given; so that this astronomical miracle, besides the political motive which it would suggest of courting such a favourite of Heaven, had been sufficient by itself to have led a curious people as far as Jerusalem, that they might see the man for whose sake the sun had forsook his course.

And here we see how hard it is to stand the shock of prosperity; and how much truer a proof we give of our strength in that extreme of life, than in the other.

In all the trials of adversity, we find that Hezekiah behaved well;—nothing unmanned him. When besieged by the Assyrian host, which shut him up in Jerusalem, and threatened his destruction,—he stood unshaken, and depended upon God's succour!—when cast down upon his bed of sickness, and threatened with death, he meekly turned his face towards the wall,—wept and prayed, and depended upon God's mercy!—but no sooner does prosperity return upon him, and the messengers from a far country come to pay the flattering homage due to his greatness, and the extraordinary felicity of his life, but he turns giddy, and sinks under the weight of his good fortune; and with a transport unbecoming a wise man upon it, 'tis said, he hearkened unto the men, and shewed them all the house of his precious things, the silver and the gold, the spices and the precious ointments, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures; that there was nothing in his house, nor in his dominions, that Hezekiah shewed them not; for though it is not expressly said here (though it is in the parallel passage in Chronicles)—nor is he

charged by the prophet that he did this out of vanity and a weak transport of ostentation,—yet, as we are sure God could not be offended but where there was a real crime, we might reasonably conclude that this was his,—and that He who searches into the heart of man, beheld that his was corrupted with the blessings he had given him, and that it was just to make what was the occasion of his pride become the instrument of his punishment, by decreeing, That all the riches he had laid up in store until that day, should be carried away in triumph to Babylon: the very place from whence the messengers had come who had been eye-witnesses of his folly.

'O Hezekiah! how couldst thou provoke God to 'bring this judgment upon thee? How could thy 'spirit, all meek and gentle as it was, have ever fall-'en into this snare? Were thy treasures rich as the 'earth,—what! was thy heart so vain as to be lifted 'up therewith? Was not all that was valuable in 'the world,—nay, was not heaven itself almost at 'thy command whilst thou wast humble? and, how 'was it that thou couldst barter away all this, for 'what was lighter than a bubble, and desecrate an 'action so full of courtesy and kindness as thine ap-'peared to be, by suffering it to take its rise from 'so polluted a fountain?'

There is scarce any thing which the heart more unwillingly bears, than an analysis of this kind.

We are a strange compound; and something foreign from what charity would suspect, so eternally twists itself into what we do, that not only in momentous concerns, where interest lists under it all the powers of disguise,—but even in the most indif-

ferent of our actions,—not worth a fallacy,—by force of habit, we continue it; so that whatever a man is about,—observe him,—he stands armed inside and out with two motives; an ostensible one for the world,—and another which he reserves for his own private use.—This, you may say, the world has no concern with: it might have been so; but by obtruding the wrong motive upon the world, and stealing from it a character, instead of winning one,—we give it a right, and a temptation along with it, to inquire into the affair.

The motives of the one for doing it, are often little better than the other for deserving it. Let us see if some social virtue may not be extracted from the errors of both the one and the other.

Vanity bids all her sons be generous and brave,—and her daughters chaste and courteous.—But why do we want her instructions?—Ask the comedian, who is taught a part he feels not.—

Is it that the principles of religion want strength, or that the real passion for what is good and worthy will not carry us high enough? God! thou knowest they carry us too high;—we want not to be,—but to seem!—

Look out of your door,—take notice of that man: see what disquieting, intriguing, and shifting, he is content to go through, merely to be thought a man of plain-dealing!—three gains of honesty would save him all this trouble:—alas! he has them not!—

Behold a second, under a show of piety, hiding the impurities of a debauched life!—he is just entering the house of God:—would he was more pure,

—or less pious!—but then he could not gain his point!

Observe a third going on almost in the same track. With what an inflexible sanctity of deportment he sustains himself as he advances!—every line in his face writes abstinence;—every stride looks like a check upon his desires. See, I beseech you, how he is cloked up with sermons, prayers, and sacraments; and so bemuffled with the externals of religion, that he has not a hand to spare for a worldly purpose!—he has armour at least:—Why does he put it on? Is there no serving God without all this? Must the garb of religion be extended so wide, to the danger of its rending?—Yes, truly, or it will not hide the secret:—and, What is that?

—That the saint has no religion at all!

But here comes Generosity; giving,—not to a decayed artist,—but to the arts and sciences themselves.—See,—he 'builds not a chamber in the wall 'apart for the prophet;' but whole schools and colleges for those who come after. Lord! how they will magnify his name!—'tis in capitals already; the first,—the highest, in the gilded rent-roll of every hospital and asylum.

—One honest tear shed in private over the unfortunate, is worth it all.

What a problematick set of creatures does simulation make us! Who would divine that all that anxiety and concern, so visible in the airs of one half of that great assembly, should arise from nothing else but that the other half of it may think them to be men of consequence, penetration, parts, and conduct?—What a noise among the claimants about it! behold Humility, out of mere pride!—and honesty

almost out of knavery!—Chastity, never once in harm's way! and courage, like a Spanish soldier upon an Italian stage,—a bladder full of wind!—Hark! that,—the sound of that trumpet,—let not my soldier run;—'tis some good Christian giving alms. O, Pity! thou gentlest of human passions! soft and tender are thy notes, and ill accord they with so loud an instrument!

Thus something jars, and will for ever jar in these cases: Imposture is all dissonance, let what master soever of it undertake the part; let him harmonize and modulate it as he may, one tone will contradict another; and whilst we have ears to hear, we shall distinguish it; 'tis truth only which is consistent and ever in harmony with itself: it sits upon our lips, like the natural notes of some melodies, ready to drop out, whether we will or no;—it racks no invention to let ourselves alone,—and needs fear no critick to have the same excellency in the heart which appears in the action.

It is a pleasing allusion the scripture makes use of in calling us sometimes a house, and sometimes a temple, according to the more or less exalted qualities of the spiritual guest which is lodged within us. Whether this is the precise ground of the distinction, I will not affirm; but thus much may be said, that, if we are to be temples, 'tis truth and singleness of heart which must make the dedication: 'tis this which must first distinguish them from the unhallowed pile, where dirty tricks and impositions are practised by the host upon the traveller, who tarries but for a moment, and returns not again.

We all take notice, how close and reserved people are; but we do not take notice, at the same time,

that every one may have something to conceal, as well as ourselves; and that we are only marking the distances and taking the measures of self-defence from each other in the very instances we complain of. This is so true, that there is scarce any character so rare as a man of real, open, and generous integrity,—who carries his heart in his hand,—who says the thing he thinks, and does the thing he pretends. Though no one can dislike the character,—yet discretion generally shakes her head,—and the world soon lets him into the reason.

" O that I had in the wilderness a lodging of way-" faring men ! that I might leave such a people, and " go from them !"—Where is the man of a nice sense of truth and strong feelings, from whom the duplicity of the world has not at one time or other wrung the same wish? and where lies the wilderness to which some one has not fled from the same melancholy impulse ?

Thus much for those who give occasion to be thought ill of.—Let us say a word or two unto those who take it.

But to avoid all common-place cant as much as I can on this head,—I will forbear to say, because I do not think it, that 'tis a breach of christian charity to think or speak evil of our neighbour, &c.

—We cannot avoid it : our opinions must follow the evidence ; and we are perpetually in such engagements and situations, that 'tis our duty to speak what our opinions are;—but God forbid that this ever should be done but from its best motive,—the sense of what is due to virtue, governed by discretion, and the utmost fellow-feeling. Were we to go on otherwise, beginning with the great broad

cloke of hypocrisy, and so down through all its little trimmings and facings, tearing away, without mercy, all that look'd seemly,—we should leave but a tatter'd world of it.

But I confine what I have to say to a character less equivocal, and which takes up too much room in the world:—it is that of those who, from a general distrust of all that looks disinterested, finding nothing to blame in an action, and perhaps much to admire in it,—immediately fall foul upon its motives: "Does Job serve God for nought?" What a vile insinuation! Besides, the question was not, Whether Job was a rich man or a poor man?—but, whether he was a man of integrity, or no? and the appearances were strong on his side. Indeed it might have been otherwise; it was possible Job might be insincere, and the devil took the advantage of the dye for it.

It is a bad picture, and done by a terrible master; and yet we are always copying it! Does a man, from a real conviction of heart, forsake his vices?—the position is not to be allowed.—No; his vices have forsaken him.

Does a pure virgin fear God and say her prayers?—She is in her climacterick.

Does humanity clothe and educate the unknown orphan?—Poverty! thou hast no genealogies!—See! is he not the father of the child? Thus do we rob heroes of the best part of their glory,—their virtue. Take away the motive of the act, you take away all that is worth having in it;—wrest it to ungenerous ends, you load the virtuous man who did it with infamy.—Undo it all,—I beseech you: give him back his honour,—restore the jewel you have

taken from him,—replace him in the eye of the world :

—it is too late !

It is painful to utter the reproaches which should come in here.—I will trust them with yourselves : in coming from that quarter, they will more naturally produce such fruits as will not set your teeth on edge ;—for they will be the fruits of love and good-will, to the praise of God and the happiness of the world ! which I wish.

SERMON XVIII.

THE LEVITE AND HIS CONCUBINE.

JUDGES XIX. 1, 2. 3.

And it came to pass in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite sojourning on the side of Mount Ephraim, who took unto him a concubine.

—A CONCUBINE !—but the text accounts for it ; " for in those days there was no king in Israel," and the Levite, you will say, like every other man in it, did what was right in his own eyes ;—and so, you may add, did his concubine too,—" for she played " the whore against him, and went away."

—Then shame and grief go with her ; and wherever she seeks a shelter, may the hand of Justice shut the door against her !

Not so ; for she went unto her father's house in Bethlehem-judah, and was with him four whole months.—Blessed interval for meditation upon the fickleness and vanity of this world and its pleasures ! I see the holy man upon his knees,—with hands compressed to his bosom, and with uplifted eyes, thanking heaven that the object which had so long shared his affections was fled !

The text gives a different picture of his situation ; " for he arose and went after her, to speak friendly " to her, and to bring her back again, having his " servant with him, and a couple of asses : and she " brought him unto her father's house ; and when

" the father of the damsel saw him, he rejoiced to " meet him."

—A most sentimental group! you'll say: and so it is, my good commentator, the world talks of every thing. Give but the outlines of a story,—let spleen or prudery snatch the pencil, and they will finish it with so many hard strokes, and with so dirty a colouring, that candour and courtesy will sit in torture as they look at it.—Gentle and virtuous spirits! ye who know not what it is to be rigid interpreters, but of your own failings,—to you I address myself, the unhired advocates for the conduct of the misguided, —Whence is it that the world is not more jealous of your office? How often must ye repeat it, 'That 'such a one's doing so or so,' is not sufficient evidence by itself to overthrow the accused!—that our actions stand surrounded with a thousand circumstances which do not present themselves at first sight!—that the first springs and motives which impell'd the unfortunate, lie deeper still!—and, that of the millions which every hour are arraign'd, thousands of them may have err'd merely from the *head*, and been actually outwitted into evil! and, even when from the *heart*,—that the difficulties and temptations under which they acted,—the force of the passions,—the suitableness of the object, and the many struggles of Virtue before she fell,—may be so many appeals from Justice to the judgment-seat of Pity!

Here then let us stop a moment, and give the story of the Levite and his concubine a second hearing. Like all others, much of it depends upon the telling; and, as the scripture has left us no kind of comment upon it, 'tis a story on which the heart

cannot be at a loss for what to say, or the imagination for what to suppose ;—the danger is, Humanity may say too much.

" And it came to pass in those days, when there " was no king in Israel, that a certain Levite so- " journing on the side of Mount Ephraim, took unto " himself a concubine."

O Abraham ! thou father of the faithful ! if this was wrong,—Why didst thou set so ensnaring an example before the eyes of thy descendant ? and, Why did the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and Jacob, bless so often the seed of such intercourses, and promise to multiply and make princes come out of them ?

God can dispense with his own laws : and accordingly we find the holiest of the patriarchs, and others in scripture, whose hearts cleaved most unto God, accommodating themselves as well as they could to the dispensation : that Abraham had Hagar ;—that Jacob, besides his two wives, Rachel and Leah, took also unto him Zilpah and Bilhah, from whom many of the tribes descended ;—that David had seven wives and ten concubines ;—Rehoboam, sixty ;—and that, in whatever cases it became reproachable, it seemed not so much the thing itself as the abuse of it, which made it so. This was remarkable in that of Solomon whose excess became an insult upon the privileges of mankind ; for, by the same plan of luxury, which made it necessary to have forty thousand stalls of horses,—he had unfortunately miscalculated his other wants, and so had seven hundred wives, and three hundred concubines.

Wise,—deluded man! was it not that thou madest some amends for thy bad practice by thy good preaching, what had become of thee!—three hundred!—but let us turn aside, I beseech you, from so sad a stumbling-block.

The Levite had but one. The Hebrew word imports a woman a concubine, or a wife a concubine, to distinguish her from the more infamous species who came under the roofs of the licentious without principle. Our annotators tell us, that in Jewish *economicks*, these differ'd little from the wife, except in some outward ceremonies and stipulations, but agreed with her, in all the true essences of marriage, and gave themselves up to the husband (for so he is call'd) with faith plighted, with sentiments, and with affection.

Such a one the Levite wanted to share his solitude, and fill up that uncomfortable blank in the heart in such a situation; for, notwithstanding all we meet with in books, in many of which, no doubt, there are a good many handsome things said upon the sweets of retirement, &c.—yet still, "it is not "good for man to be alone:" nor can all which the cold-hearted pedant stuns our ears with upon the subject, ever give one answer of satisfaction to the mind; in the midst of the loudest vauntings of philosophy, nature will have her yearnings for society and friendship;—a good heart wants some object to be kind to;—and the best parts of our blood, and the purest of our spirits, suffer most under the destitution.

Let the torpid monk seek heaven comfortless and alone.—God speed him! For my own part, I fear, I should never so find the way. Let me be wise and

religious,—but let me be man. Wherever thy providence places me, or whatever be the road I take to get to thee,—give me some companion in my journey, be it only to remark to, how our shadows lengthen as the sun goes down !—to whom I may say, how fresh is the face of nature !—how sweet the flowers of the field !—how delicious are these fruits !

Alas ! with bitter herbs, like his passover, did the Levite eat them : for as they thus walked the path of life together,—she wantonly turn'd aside unto another, and fled from him.

It is the mild and quiet half of the world who are generally outraged and borne down by the other half of it : but in this they have the advantage ; whatever be the sense of their wrongs, that pride stands not so watchful a centinel over their forgiveness, as it does in the breasts of the fierce and froward. We should all of us, I believe, be more forgiving than we are, would the world but give us leave ; but it is apt to interpose its ill-offices in remissions, especially of this kind. The truth is, it has its laws, to which the heart is not always a party ; and acts so like an unfeeling engine in all cases without distinction, that it requires all the firmness of the most settled humanity to bear up against it.

Many a bitter conflict would the Levite have to sustain with himself,—his concubine,—and the sentiments of his tribe, upon the wrong done him :—much matter for pleading,—and many an embarrassing account on all sides. In a period of four whole months, every passion would take its empire by turns ; and in the ebbs and flows of the less unfriendly ones, pity would find some moments to be

heard,—religion herself would not be silent,—charity would have much to say;—and thus attun'd, every object he beheld on the borders of Mount Ephraim,—every grot and grove he pass'd by, would solicit the recollection of former kindness, and awaken an advocate in her behalf, more powerful than them all.

'I grant,—I grant it all,'—he would cry;—'tis 'foul! 'tis faithless!—but, why is the door of mercy to be shut forever against it? and, why is it to 'be the only sad crime that the injured may not remit, or reason, or imagination pass over without 'a scar?—Is it the blackest? In what catalogue of 'human offences is it so marked? or, is it, that of 'all others 'tis a blow most grievous to be endured?—The heart cries out, it is so: but let me ask 'my own, what passions are they which give edge 'and force to this weapon which has struck me? 'and, whether it is not my own pride, as much as 'my virtues, which at this moment excite the greatest part of that intolerable anguish in the wound 'which I am laying to her charge? But, merciful 'Heaven, was it otherwise, why is an unhappy 'creature of thine to be persecuted by me with so 'much cruel revenge and rancorous despite as my 'first transport called for? Have faults no extenuations?—Makes it nothing, that when the trespass 'was committed, she forsook the partner of her 'guilt, and fled directly to her father's house? And 'is there no difference betwixt one propensely going out of the road and continuing there, through 'depravity of will,—and a hapless wanderer straying by delusion, and warily treading back her 'steps?—Sweet is the look of sorrow for an offence,

‘ in a heart determined never to commit it more!—
‘ Upon that altar only could I offer up my wrongs.
‘ Cruel is the punishment which an ingenuous mind
‘ will take upon itself, from the remorse of so hard
‘ a trespass against me ; and if that will not balance
‘ the account,—just God ! let me forgive the rest.
‘ Mercy well becomes the heart of all thy creatures !
‘ —but most of thy servant, a Levite, who offers up
‘ so many daily sacrifices to thee, for the transgres-
‘ sions of thy people.—

—‘ But to little purpose,’ he would add, ‘ have I
‘ served at thy altar, where my business was to sue
‘ for mercy, had I not learnt to practise it.’

Peace and happiness rest upon the head and heart of every man who can thus think !

“ So he arose, and went after her, to speak friend-
“ ly unto her :”—in the original,—*to speak to her heart ;*—to apply to their former endearments,—and to ask, how she could be so unkind to him, and so very unkind to herself ?—

—Even the upbraidings of the quiet and relenting are sweet : not like the strivings of the fierce and inexorable, who bite and devour all who have thwarted them in their way ;—but they are calm and courteous, like the spirit which watches over their character. How could such a temper woo the damsel, and not bring her back ! or, how could the father of the damsel, in such a scene, have a heart open to any impressions but those mentioned in the text ;—“ That when he saw him, he rejoiced to
“ meet him ;”—urged his stay from day to day, with that most irresistible of all invitations,—
“ Comfort thy heart, and tarry all night, and let
“ thine heart be merry.”

If mercy and truth thus met together in settling this account, love would surely be of the party: great,—great is its power in cementing what has been broken, and wiping out wrongs even from the memory itself! and so it was,—for the Levite arose up, and with him his concubine and his servant, and they departed.

It serves no purpose to pursue the story further; the catastrophe is horrid, and would lead us beyond the particular purpose for which I have enlarged upon thus much of it; and that is, to discredit rash judgment, and illustrate from the manner of conducting this drama, the courtesy which the *dramatis personæ* of every other piece may have a right to. Almost one half of our time is spent in telling and hearing evil of one another;—some unfortunate knight is always upon the stage;—and every hour brings forth something strange and terrible to fill up our discourse and our astonishment, 'How people can be so foolish!'—and 'tis well if the compliment ends there; so that there is not a social virtue for which there is so constant a demand,—or, consequently, so well worth cultivating, as that which opposes this unfriendly current. Many and rapid are the springs which feed it; and various and sudden, God knows, are the guests which render it unsafe to us in this short passage of our life! Let us make the discourse as servicable as we can, by tracing some of the most remarkable of them up to their source.

And, first, there is one miserable inlet to this evil, and which, by the way, if speculation is supposed to precede practice, may have been derived, for aught I know, from some of our busiest enquirers after na-

ture ;—and that is, when with more zeal than knowledge we account for phenomena before we are sure of their existence.—" It is not the manner of the " Romans to condemn any man to death" (much less to be martyred) said Festus ;—" and doth our " law judge any man before it hear him, and know " what he doth ?" cried Nicodemus ; " and he that " answereth, or determineth a matter before he has " heard it,—it is folly, and a shame unto him."—We are generally in such a haste to make our own decrees, that we pass over the justice of these,—and then the scene is so changed by it, that 'tis our own folly only which is real, and that of the accused which is imaginary : through too much precipitancy it will happen so ; and then the jest is spoiled,—or we have criticised our own shadow.

A second way is, when the process goes on more orderly, and we begin with getting information ;—but do it from those suspected evidences, against which our Saviour warns us when he bids us " Not " to judge according to appearance."—In truth, 'tis behind these that most of the things which blind human judgment lie concealed ;—and, on the contrary, there are many things which appear to be,—which are not : " Christ came eating and drinking, " —behold a wine-bibber !"—he sat with sinners,—he was their friend :—in many cases of which kind, truth, like a modest matron, scorns art,—and disdains to press herself forwards into the circle to be seen :—ground sufficient for suspicion to draw up the libel,—for malice to give the torture,—or rash judgment to start up and pass a final sentence.

A third way is, when the facts which denote misconduct are less disputable, but are commented up-

on with an asperity of censure, which a humane or a gracious temper would spare. An abhorrence against what is criminal, is so fair a plea for this, and looks so like virtue in the face, that in a sermon against rash judgment, it would be unseasonable to call it in question,—and yet, I declare, in the fullest torrent of exclamations which the guilty can deserve, that the simple apostrophe, 'Who made me to dif-'fer?—why was not I an example?' would touch my heart more, and give me a better earnest of the commentators,—than the most corrosive period you could add. The punishment of the unhappy, I fear, is enough without it;—and were it not,—'tis piteous, the tongue of a christian (whose religion is all candour and courtesy) should be made the executioner! We find in the discourse between Abraham and the rich man, though the one was in heaven, and the other in hell, yet still the patriarch treated him with mild language:—"Son! son, remember that "thou in thy life time," &c.—And in the dispute about the body of Moses, between the archangel and the devil (himself) St. Jude tells us, he durst not bring a railing accusation against him;—'twas unworthy his high character,—and, indeed, might have been impolitick too; for if he had, (as one of our divines notes upon the passage) the devil had been too hard for him at railing;—'twas his own weapon;—and the basest spirits, after his example, are the most expert at it.

This leads me to the observation of a fourth cruel inlet to this evil; and that is, the desire of being thought men of wit and parts; and the vain expectation of coming honestly by the title, by shrewd and sarcastick reflections upon whatever is done in

the world. This is setting up trade upon the broken stock of other people's failings,—perhaps their misfortunes:—so much good may it do them with what honour they can get,—the furthest extent of which, I think, is to be praised, as we do some sauces, with tears in our eyes. It is a commerce most illiberal; and as it requires no vast capital, too many embark in it; and so long as there are bad passions to be gratified, and bad heads to judge,—with such it may pass for wit, or at least, like some vile relation whom all the family is ashamed of, claim kindred with it, even in better companies. Whatever be the degree of its affinity, it has helped to give wit a bad name; as if the main essence of it was satire:—certainly there is a difference between bitterness and saltness;—that is,—between the malignity and the festivity of wit:—the one is a mere quickness of apprehension, void of humanity,—and is a talent of the devil; the other comes from the Father of Spirits, so pure and abstracted from persons, that willingly it hurts no man; or, if it touches upon an indecorum, 'tis with that dexterity of true genius, which enables him rather to give a new colour to the absurdity, and let it pass.—He may smile at the shape of the obelisk raised to another's fame;—but the malignant wit will level it at once with the ground, and build his own upon the ruins of it.—

What then, ye rash censurers of the world! Have ye no mansions for your credit but those from whence ye have extruded the right owners? Are there no regions for you to shine in, that ye descend for it into the low caverns of abuse and crimination? Have ye no seats but those of the scornful to sit

down in? If honour has mistook his road, or the virtues, in their excesses, have approached too near the confines of vice, are they, therefore, to be cast down the precipice? Must beauty forever be trampled upon in the dirt for one—one false step? And shall no one virtue or good quality, out of the thousand the fair penitent may have left,—shall not one of them be suffered to stand by her?—Just God of heaven and earth!

—But thou art merciful, loving, and righteous, and lookest down with pity upon these wrongs thy servants do unto each other. Pardon us, we beseech thee, for them, and all our transgressions! let it not be remembered that we were brethren of the same flesh, the same feelings and infirmities! O my God! write it not down in thy book that thou madest us merciful after thy own image!—that thou hast given us a religion so courteous,—so good temper'd,—that every precept of it carries a balm along with it to heal the soreness of our natures and sweeten our spirits, that we might live with such kind intercourse in this world, as will fit us to exist together in a better!

SERMON XIX.

FELIX'S BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS PAUL, EXAMINED.

ACTS XXIV. 26.

He hoped also, that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him.

A NOBLE object to take up the consideration of the Roman governor!

—"He hoped that money should have been given him!"—for what end? To enable him to judge betwixt right and wrong?—and, from whence was it to be wrung? From the poor script of a disciple of the carpenter's son, who left nothing to his followers but poverty and sufferings!—

And was this Felix?—the great, the noble Felix!—Felix the happy!—the gallant Felix, who kept Drusilla?—Could he do this?—Base passion,—what canst thou not make us do!

Let us consider the whole transaction.

Paul, in the beginning of this chapter, had been accused before Felix, by Tertullus, of very grievous crimes;—of being a pestilent fellow,—a mover of seditions, and a profaner of the temple, &c.—To which accusations, the apostle having liberty from Felix to reply, he makes his defence, from the 10th to the 22d verse, to this purport:—He shews him, first, that the whole charge was destitute of all proof; which he openly challenges them to produce

against him, if they had it:—that, on the contrary, he was so far from being the man Tertullus had represented, that the very principles of the religion with which he then stood charged,—and which they called heresy, led him to be the most unexceptionable in his conduct, by the continual exercise which it demanded of him, of having a conscience void of offence at all times, both towards God and man:—that consistently with this, his adversaries had neither found him in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, either in the synagogue, or in the city;—for this he appeals to themselves:—that it was but twelve days since he came up to Jerusalem for to worship:—that during that time, when he purified in the temple, he did it as became him, without noise, without tumult: this he calls upon the Jews who came from Asia, and were eye-witneses of his behaviour, to attest;—and, in a word, he urges the whole defence before Felix in so strong a manner, and with such plain and natural arguments of his innocence, as to leave no colour for his adversaries to reply.

There was, however, still one adversary in this court,—though silent, yet not satisfied.—

—Spare thy eloquence, Tertullus! roll up the charge: a more notable orator than thyself is risen up,—'tis avarice; and that too in the most fatal place for the prisoner it could have taken possession of:—'tis in the heart of the man who judges him.

If Felix believed Paul innocent, and acted accordingly;—that is, released him without reward,—this subtile advocate told him he would lose one of the profits of his employment;—and if he acknowledg-

ed the faith of Christ, which Paul occasionally explained in his defence,—it told him, he might lose the employment itself;—so that, notwithstanding the character of the apostle appeared (as it was) most spotless, and the faith he professed so very clear, that as he urged it, the heart gave its consent,—yet, at the same time, the passions rebelled; and so strong an interest was formed thereby, against the first impressions in favour of the man and his cause, that both were dismissed;—the one to a more convenient hearing, which never came; the other to the hardships of a prison for two whole years,—hoping, as the text informs us, that money should have been given him: and even at the last, when he left the province, willing to do the Jews a pleasure;—that is,—to serve his interest in another shape, with all the conviction upon his mind that he had done nothing worthy of bonds, he, nevertheless, left the holy man bound, and consigned over to the hopeless prospect of ending his days in the same state of confinement in which he had ungenerously left him.

One would imagine, as covetousness is a vice not naturally cruel in itself, that there must certainly have been a mixture of other motives in the governor's breast, to account for a proceeding so contrary to humanity and his own conviction: and could it be of use to raise conjectures upon it, there seems but too probable grounds for such a supposition. It seems that Drusilla, whose curiosity, upon a double account, had led her to hear Paul,—(for she was a daughter of Abraham—as well as of Eve) —was a character which might have figured very well even in our own times; for, as Josephus tells

us, she had left the Jew her husband; and, without any pretence in their law to justify a divorce, had given herself up without ceremony to Felix; for which cause, though she is here called his wife, she was, in reason and justice, the wife of another man,—and consequently lived in an open state of adultery;—so that when Paul, in explaining the faith of Christ, took occasion to argue upon the morality of the gospel,—and urged the eternal laws of justice, the unchangeable obligations to temperance, of which chastity was a branch,—it was scarce possible to frame his discourse so (had he wished to temporize) but that either her interest or her love must have taken offence: and though we do not read, like Felix, that she trembled at the account, 'tis yet natural to imagine she was affected with other passions, of which the apostle might feel the effects;—and 'twas well he suffered no more, if two such violent enemies as lust and avarice were combined against him.

But this by the way;—for as the text seems only to acknowledge one of these motives, it is not our business to assign the other.

It is observable, that this same apostle, speaking, in the Epistle to Timothy, of the ill effects of this same ruling passion, affirms, that it is the root of all evil; and I make no doubt but the remembrance of his own sufferings had no small share in the severity of the reflection.—Infinite are the examples where the love of money is only a subordinate and ministerial passion, exercised for the support of some other vices: and 'tis generally found, when there is either ambition, prodigality, or lust, to be fed by it, that it then rages with the least mercy and

discretion; in which cases, strictly speaking, it is not the root of other evils,—but other evils are the root of it.

This forces me to recall what I have said upon covetousness, as a vice not naturally cruel: it is not apt to represent itself to our imaginations, at first sight, under that idea: we consider it only as a mean, worthless turn of mind, incapable of judging or doing what is right: but as it is a vice which does not always set up for itself,—to know truly what it is in this repect, we must know what masters it serves:—they are many, and of various casts and humours;—and each one lends it something of its own conplexional tint and character.

This, I suppose, may be the cause that there is a greater and more whimsical mystery in the love of money, than in the darkest and most nonsensical problem that ever was pored on.

Even at the best, and when the passion seems to seek nothing more than its own amusement,—there is little,—very little, I fear, to be said for its humanity.—It may be a sport to the miser;—but consider,—it must be death and destruction to others. —The moment this sordid humour begins to govern,—farewell all honest and natural affection! farewell all he owes to parents, to children, to friends! —how fast the obligations vanish! see,—he is now stripped of all feelings whatever:—the shrill cry of justice,—and the low lamentation of humble distress, are notes equally beyond his compass!—Eternal God! see!—he passes by one whom thou hast just bruised, without one pensive reflection!—he enters the cabin of the widow whose husband and child thou hast taken to thyself,—exacts his bond

without a sigh!—Heaven! if I am to be tempted,—let it be by glory,—by ambition,—by some generous and manly vice:—if I must fall, let it be by some passion which thou hast planted in my nature which shall not harden my heart, but leave me room at last to retreat and come back to thee!

It would be easy here to add the common arguments which reason offers against this vice; but they are so well understood, both in matter and form,—it is needless.

I might cite to you what Seneca says upon it;—but the misfortune is, that at the same time he was writing against riches, he was enjoying a great estate, and using every means to make that estate still greater!

With infinite pleasure might a preacher enrich his discourse in this place, by weaving into it all the smart things which antient or modern wits have said upon the love of money:—he might inform you,

'—That poverty wants something:—that covetousness wanteth all!'

'That a miser can only be said to have riches as a sick man has a fever, which holds and tyrannizes over the man,—not he over it!'

'That covetousness is the shirt of the soul,—the last vice it parts with!'

'That nature is content with few things;—or, that nature is never satisfied at all,' &c.

The reflection of our Saviour, "That the life of "man consisteth not in the abundance of the things "which he possesseth,"—speaks more to the heart;—and the single hint of the camel, and what a very

narrow passage he has to go through,—has more coercion in it than all the see-saws of philosophy.

I shall endeavour therefore to draw such other reflections from this piece of sacred history as are applicable to human life,—and more likely to be of use.

There is nothing generally in which our happiness and honour are more nearly concerned, than in forming true notions both of men and things; for in proportion as we think rightly of them, we approve ourselves to the world;—and as we govern ourselves by such judgments, so we secure our peace and well-being in passing through it: the false steps and miscarriages in life, issuing from a defect in this capital point, are so many and fatal, that there can be nothing more instructive than an inquiry into the causes of this perversion, which often appears so very gross in us, that were you to take a view of the world,—see what notions it entertains, and by what considerations it is governed, —you would say of the mistakes of human judgment, what the prophet does of the folly of human actions,—"That we were wise to do evil; but to "judge rightly, had no understanding."

That in many dark and abstracted questions of mere speculation, we should err,—is not strange: we live among mysteries and riddles; and almost every thing which comes in our way, in one light or other, may be said to baffle our understandings, —yet seldom so as to mistake in extremities, and take one contrary for another.—'Tis very rare, for instance, that we take the virtue of a plant to be hot, when it is extremely cold;—or, that we try the experiment of opium to keep us waking:—yet this

we are continually attempting in the conduct of life, as well as in the great ends and measures of it. That such wrong determinations in us do arise from any defect of judgment inevitably misleading us,—would reflect dishonour upon God; as if he had made and sent men into the world on purpose to play the fool. His all-bountiful hand made his judgment, like his heart, upright; and the instances of his sagacity, in other things, abundantly confirm it: we are led therefore in course to a supposition, that in all inconsistent instances there is a secret bias, somehow or other, hung upon the mind, which turns it aside from reason and truth.

What this is, if we do not care to search for it in ourselves, we shall find it registered in this transaction of Felix: and we may depend, that in all wrong judgments whatever in such plain cases as this, that the same explanation must be given of it which is given in the text,—namely, that it is some selfish consideration—some secret dirty engagement with some little appetite, which does us so much dishonour.

The judgments of the more disinterested and impartial of us, receive no small tincture from our affections: we generally consult them in all doubtful points; and it happens well if the matter in question is not almost settled before the arbitrator is called into the debate.—But in the more flagrant instances, where the passions govern the whole man, 'tis melancholy to see the office to which reason, the great prerogative of his nature, is reduced; serving the lower appetites in the dishonest drudgery of finding out arguments to justify the present pursuit.

To judge rightly of our own worth, we should retire a little from the world, to see all its pleasures,—and pains too, in their proper size and dimensions.—This, no doubt, was the reason St. Paul, when he intended to convert Felix, began his discourse upon the day of judgment, on purpose to take the heart off from this world and its pleasures, which dishonour the understanding so, as to turn the wisest of men into fools and children.

If you enlarge your observations upon this plan, you will find where the evil lies which has supported those desperate opinions which have so long divided the christian world,—and are likely to divide it forever.

Consider popery well; you will be convinced, that the truest definition which can be given of it is,—That it is a pecuniary system, well contrived to operate upon men's passions and weakness, whilst their pockets are o'picking! Run through all the points of difference between us;—and when you see that, in every one of them, they serve the same end which Felix had in view, either of money or power, there is little room left to doubt whence the cloud arises which is spread over the understanding.

If this reasoning is conclusive with regard to those who merely differ from us in religion,—let us try if it will not hold good with regard to those who have none at all;—or rather, who affect to treat all persuasions of it with ridicule alike. Thanks to good sense, good manners, and a more enlarged knowledge, this humour is going down, and seems to be settling at present, chiefly amongst the inferior classes of people,—where it is likely to rest. As for the lowest ranks, though they are apt enough

to follow the modes of their betters, yet are they not likely to be struck with this one, of making merry with that which is their consolation; they are too serious a set of poor people ever heartily to enter into it.—

There is enough, however, of it in the world to say, that this all-sacred system, which holds the world in harmony and peace, is too often the first object that the giddy and inconsiderate make choice of to try the temper of their wits upon. Now, of the numbers who make this experiment, do you believe that one in a thousand does it from conviction —or from arguments which a course of study,—much cool reasoning,—and a sober inquiry into antiquity, and the true merits of the question, have furnished him with?—The years and way of life of the most forward of these, lead us to a different explanation.

Religion, which lays so many restraints upon us, is a troublesome companion to those who will lay no restraints upon themselves;—and for this reason there is nothing more common to be observed, than that the little arguments and cavils which such men have gathered up against it in the early part of their lives,—how considerable soever they may have appeared, when viewed through their passions and prejudices, which give an unnatural turn to all objects,—yet, when the edge of appetite has been worn down, and the heat of the pursuit pretty well over, —and reason and judgment have got possession of their empire,—

—They seldom fail of bringing the lost sheep back to his fold.

May God bring us all there. Amen.

SERMON XX.

THE PRODIGAL SON.

LUKE XV. 13.

And not many days after, the younger son gathered all he had together, and took his journey into a far country.

I KNOW not whether the remark is to our honour or otherwise, that lessons of wisdom have never such power over us as when they are wrought into the heart through the ground-work of a story which engages the passions. Is it that we are like iron, and must first be heated before we can be wrought upon? or, is the heart so in love with deceit, that, where a true report will not reach it, we must cheat it with a fable, in order to come at truth?

Whether this parable of the Prodigal (for so it is usually called) is really such,—or built upon some story known at that time in Jerusalem, is not much to the purpose; it is given us to enlarge upon, and turn to the best moral account we can.

"A certain man," says our Saviour, "had two "sons, and the younger of them said to his fa- "ther, Give me the portion of goods which falls to "me: and he divided unto them his substance. "And not many days after, the younger son gather- "ed all together, and took his journey into a far "country, and there wasted his substance with ri- "otous living."

The account is short: the interesting and pathetick passages with which such a transaction would be necessarily connected, are left to be supplied by the heart:—the story is silent,—but nature is not:—much kind advice, and many a tender expostulation, would fall from the father's lips, no doubt, upon this occasion.

He would dissuade his son from the folly of so rash an enterprize, by shewing him the dangers of the journey,—the inexperience of his age,—the hazards his life, his fortune, his virtue, would run, without a guide, without a friend: he would tell him of the many snares and temptations which he had to avoid or encounter at every step,—the pleasures which would solicit him in every luxurious court,—the little knowledge he could gain,—except that of evil: he would speak of the seductions of women,—their charms,—their poisons;—what hapless indulgences he might give way to when far from restraint, and the check of giving his father pain.

The dissuasive would but inflame his desire.—He gathers all together.

——I see the picture of his departure;—the camels and asses loaden with his substance, detached on one side of the piece, and already on their way:—the prodigal son standing on the fore-ground, with a forced sedateness, struggling against the fluttering movement of joy, upon his deliverance from restraint—the elder brother holding his hand, as if unwilling to let it go:—the father,—sad moment! with a firm look, covering a prophetick sentiment, 'that all would not go well with his child,'—approaching to embrace him and bid him adieu.—Poor inconsiderate youth! From whose arms art

thou flying? From what a shelter art thou going forth into the storm? Art thou weary of a father's affection,—of a father's care? or, hopest thou to find a warmer interest, a truer counsellor, or a kinder friend in a land of strangers, where youth is made a prey, and so many thousands are confederated to deceive them, and live by their spoils?

We will seek no farther than this idea for the extravagances by which the prodigal son added one unhappy example to the number: his fortune wasted,—the followers of it fled in course,—the wants of nature remain,—the hand of God gone forth against him;—"for when he had spent all, a "mighty famine arose in that country."—Heaven! have pity upon the youth, for he is in hunger and distress;—stray'd out of the reach of a parent, who counts every hour of his absence with anguish;—cut off from all his tender offices by his folly,—and from relief and charity from others, by the calamity of the times!

Nothing so powerfully calls home the mind as distress; the tense fibre then relaxes,—the soul retires to itself,—sits pensive and susceptible of right impressions: if we have a friend, 'tis then we think of him; if a benefactor, at that moment all his kindnesses press upon our mind.—Gracious and bountiful God! Is it not for this that they who, in their prosperity, forget thee, do yet remember and return to thee in the hour of their sorrow? When our heart is in heaviness, upon whom can we think but thee, who knowest our necessities afar off,—puttest all our tears in thy bottle,—seest every careful thought,—hearest every sigh and melancholy groan we utter!

Strange!—that we should only begin to think of God with comfort, when with joy and comfort we can think of nothing else!

Man surely is a compound of riddles and contradictions: by the law of his nature he avoids pain, and yet, "unless he suffers in the flesh, he will not "cease from sin," though it is sure to bring pain and misery upon his head forever.

Whilst all went pleasurable on with the prodigal, we hear not one word concerning his father;—no pang of remorse for the sufferings in which he had left him, or resolution of returning, to make up the account of his folly:—his first hour of distress seem'd to be his first hour of wisdom:—"When he "came to himself, he said, How many hired ser- "vants of my father have bread enough and to "spare, whilst I perish!"

Of all the terrors of nature, that of one day or other dying by hunger, is the greatest; and it is wisely wove into our frame to awaken man to industry, and call forth his talents; and though we seem to go on carelessly, sporting with it as we do with other terrors,—yet he that sees this enemy fairly, and in his most frightful shape, will need no long remonstrance to make him turn out of the way to avoid him.

It was the case of the prodigal;—he arose to go to his father.

——Alas! How should he tell his story?—Ye who have trod this round, tell me in what words he shall give in to his father the sad *items* of his extravagance!

——The feasts and banquets which he gave to whole cities in the east,—the costs of Asiatick rari-

ities,—and of Asiatick cooks to dress them;—the expenses of singing men and singing women,—the flute, the harp, the sackbut, and of all kinds of musick;—the dress of the Persian courts, how magnificent! their slaves how numerous!—their chariots, their horses, their palaces, their furniture, what immense sums they had devoured!—what expectations from strangers of condition! what exactions!

How shall the youth make his father comprehend that he was cheated at Damascus by one of the best men in the world;—that he had lent a part of his substance to a friend at Nineveh, who had fled off with it to the Ganges;—that a whore of Babylon had swallowed his best pearl, and anointed the whole city with his balm of Gilead;—that he had been sold by a man of honour for twenty shekels of silver to a worker in graven images;—that the images he had purchased had profited him nothing;—that they could not be transported across the wilderness, and had been burnt with fire at Shusan;—that the *apes and peacocks, which he had sent for from Tarsis, lay dead upon his hands; and that the mummies had not been dead long enough, which had been brought him out of Egypt:—that all had gone wrong since the day he forsook his father's house?

——Leave the story;—it will be told more concisely.—"When he was yet afar off, his father saw "him;"—Compassion told it in three words,—"he "fell upon his neck, and kissed him."

Great is the power of eloquence; but never is it so great as when it pleads along with nature, and the culprit is a child strayed from his duty, and re-

Vide 2 Chron. ix. 21.

turned to it again with tears. Casuists may settle the point as they will; but what could a parent see more in the account than the natural one, of an ingenuous heart too open for the world,—smitten with strong sensations of pleasures, and suffered to sally forth unarm'd into the midst of enemies stronger than himself?

Generosity sorrows as much for the over-matched, as pity herself does.

The idea of a son so ruin'd, would double the father's caresses: every effusion of his tenderness would add bitterness to his son's remorse.—'Gracious Heaven! what a father have I rendered miserable!'

"And he said, I have sinned against Heaven, and "in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called "thy son."

"But the father said, Bring forth the best robe."

O ye affections! how fondly do you play at cross purposes with each other!—'Tis the natural dialogue of true transport: joy is not methodical; and where an offender, beloved, overcharges itself in the offence,—words are too cold; and a conciliated heart replies by tokens of esteem.

"And he said unto his servants, Bring forth the "best robe, and put it on him: and put a ring on "his hand, and shoes on his feet, and bring hither "the fatted calf, and let us eat and drink, and be "merry."

When the affections so kindly break loose, joy is another name for religion.

We look up as we taste it: the cold stoick without, when he hears the dancing and the musick, may ask sullenly (with the elder brother) what it means?

and refuse to enter: but the humane and compassionate all fly impetuously to the banquet, given for "a son who was dead, and is alive again!—who was "lost, and is found." Gentle spirits, light up the pavilion with a sacred fire; and parental love and filial piety, lead in the mask with riot and wild festivity!—Was it not for this that God gave man musick to strike upon the kindly passions; that nature taught the feet to dance to its movements, and, as chief governess of the feast, poured forth wine into the goblet to crown it with gladness?

The intention of this parable is so clear from the occasion of it, that it will not be necessary to perplex it with any tedious explanation: it was designed by way of indirect remonstrance to the scribes and pharisees, who animadverted upon our Saviour's conduct, for entering so freely into conferences with sinners, in order to reclaim them. To that end, he proposes the parable of the shepherd, who left his ninety-and-nine sheep that were safe in the fold, to go and seek for one sheep that was gone astray,—telling them, in other places, that they who were whole wanted not a physician, —but they that were sick: and here, to carry on the same lesson, and to prove how acceptable such a recovery was to God, he relates this account of the prodigal son and his welcome reception.

I know not whether it would be a subject of much edification to convince you here, that our Saviour, by the prodigal son, particularly pointed at those who are *sinners of the Gentiles*, and were recovered by divine grace to repentance;—and that, by the elder brother, he intended as manifestly the more froward of the Jews, who envied their conversion,

and thought it a kind of wrong to their primogeniture, in being made fellow-heirs with them of the promises of God.

These uses have been so ably set forth, in so many good sermons upon the prodigal son, that I shall turn aside from them at present, and content myself with some reflections upon that fatal passion which led him,—and so many thousands after the example, "to gather all he had together, and take "his journey into a far country."

The love of variety, or curiosity of seeing new things, which is the same, or at least a sister passion to it,—seems wove into the frame of every son and daughter of Adam; we usually speak of it as one of nature's levities, though planted within us for the solid purposes of carrying forward the mind to fresh inquiry and knowledge. Strip us of it, the mind (I fear) would doze forever over the present page, and we should all of us rest at ease with such objects as presented themselves in the parish or province where we first drew breath.

It is to this spur, which is ever in our sides, that we owe the impatience of this desire for travelling: the passion is no way bad,—but, as others are,—in its mismanagement or excess;—order it rightly, the advantages are worth the pursuit; the chief of which are,—to learn the languages, the laws and customs, and understand the government and interest of other nations;—to acquire an urbanity and confidence of behaviour, and fit the mind more easily for conversation and discourse;—to take us out of the company of our aunts and grandmothers, and from the track of nursery mistakes; and by showing us new objects, or old ones in new lights, to re-

form our judgments ;—by tasting perpetually the varieties of nature, to know what *is good ;*—by observing the address and arts of man, to conceive what *is sincere ;*—and, by seeing the difference of so many various humours and manners,—to look into ourselves, and form our own.

This is some part of the cargo we might return with ; but the impulse of seeing new sights, augmented with that of getting clear from all lessons both of wisdom and reproof at home,—carries our youth too early out, to turn this venture to much account ; on the contrary, if the scene painted of the prodigal in his travels, looks more like a copy than an original,—will it not be well if such an adventurer, with so unpromising a setting out,—without *carte*,—without compass,—be not cast away forever ;—and may he not be said to escape well,—if he return to his country only as naked as he first left it ?

But you will send an able pilot with your son :—a scholar.

If wisdom can speak in no other language but Greek or Latin,—you do well ;—or, if mathematicks will make a man a gentleman,—or natural philosophy but teach him to make a bow,—he may be of some service in introducing your son into good societies, and supporting him in them when he has done ;—but the upshot will be generally this, that, in the most pressing occasions of address,—if he is a mere man of reading, the unhappy youth will have the tutor to carry,—and not the tutor to carry him.

But you will avoid this extreme ; he shall be escorted by one who knows the world, not merely from books,—but from his own experience ;—a

man who has been employed on such services, and thrice made *the tour of Europe with success ;*—

——That is, without breaking his own or his pupil's neck ;—for if he is such as my eyes have seen! some broken *Swiss valet de chambre*,—some general undertaker, who will perform the journey in so many months, *if God permit*,—much knowledge will not accrue ;—some profit at least ;—he will learn the amount, to a halfpenny, of every stage from Calais to Rome ;—he will be carried to the best inns, —instructed where there is the best wine, and sup a livre cheaper than if the youth had been left to make the tour and the bargain himself.——Look at our governor, I beceech you !—see, he is an inch taller as he relates the advantages !

——And here endeth his pride, his knowledge, and his use.

But, when your son gets abroad, he will be taken out of his hand, by his society with men of rank and letters, with whom he will pass the greatest part of his time.

Let me observe, in the first place,—that company which is really good is very rare, and very shy ; but you have surmounted this difficulty, and procured him the best letters of recommendation to the most eminent and respectable in every capital.

And I answer, that he will obtain all by them which courtesy strictly stands obliged to pay on such occasions, but no more.

There is nothing in which we are so much deceived as in the advantages proposed from our connections and discourse with the *literati*, &c. in foreign parts ; especially if the experiment is made before we are matured by years or study.

Conversation is a traffick ; and if you enter into it without some stock of knowledge to balance the account perpetually betwixt you,—the trade drops at once :—and this is the reason,—however it may be boasted to the contrary, why travellers have so little (especially good) conversation with natives,—owing to their suspicion,—or, perhaps, conviction, that there is nothing to be extracted from the conversation of young itinerants worth the trouble of their bad language,—or the interruption of their visits.

The pain on these occasions is usually reciprocal ; the consequence of which is, that the disappointed youth seeks an easier society ; and as bad company is always ready, and ever lying in wait,—the career is soon finished ; and the poor prodigal returns the same object of pity with the prodigal in the gospel.

SERMON XXI.

NATIONAL MERCIES CONSIDERED*.

DEUTERONOMY VI. 20, 21.

And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord our God hath commanded you? then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharaoh's bondsmen in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

THESE are the words which Moses left as a standing answer for the children of Israel to give their posterity, who in time to come might become ignorant, or unmindful of the many and great mercies which God had vouchsafed to their forefathers: all which had terminated in that one of their deliverance out of bondage.

Though they were directed to speak in this manner, each man to his son, yet one cannot suppose that the direction should be necessary for the next generation,—for the children of those who had been eye-witnesses of God's providence: it does not seem likely that any of them should arrive to that age of reasoning which would put them upon asking the supposed question, and not be long beforehand instructed in the answer. Every parent would tell his child the hardships of his captivity, and the amazing particulars of his deliverance: the story was so uncommon,—so full of wonder,—and withal,

* On the Inauguration of his present Majesty.

the recital of it would ever be a matter of such transport, it could not possibly be kept a secret :— the piety and gratitude of one generation would anticipate the curiosity of another ; their sons would learn the story with their language.

This probably might be the case with the first or second race of people ; but in process of time, things might take a different turn : a long and disturbed possession of their liberties might blunt the sense of those providences of God which had procured them, and set the remembrance of all his mercies at too great a distance from their hearts. After they had for some years been eased of every real burden, an access of freedom might make them restless under every imaginary one, and, amongst others, that of their religion ; from thence they might seek occasion to enquire into the foundation and fitness of its ceremonies, its statutes, and its judgments.

They might ask, What meant so many commands, in matters which to them appeared indifferent in their own natures? What policy in ordaining them? and, What obligation could there lie upon reasonable creatures, to comply with a multitude of such unaccountable injunctions, so unworthy the wisdom of God.

Hereafter, possibly, they might go further lengths ; and though their natural bent was generally towards superstition ; yet some adventurers, as is ever the case, might steer for the opposite coast, and as they advanced, might discover that all religions, of what denominations or complexions soever, were alike :— that the religion of their own country, in particular, was a contrivance of the priests and Levites,—a

phantom dressed out in a terrifying garb of their own making, to keep weak minds in fear :—that its rites and ceremonies, and numberless injunctions, were so many different wheels in the same political engine, put in, no doubt, to amuse the ignorant, and keep them in such a state of darkness as clerical juggling requires.

That as for the moral part of it, though it was unexceptionable in itself,—yet it was a piece of intelligence they did not stand in want of; men had natural reason always to have found it out,—and wisdom to have practised it, without Moses's assistance.

Nay, possibly, in process of time, they might arrive at greater improvements in religious controversy ;—when they had given their system of infidelity all the strength it could admit of from reason, they might begin to embellish it with some more sprightly conceits and turns of ridicule.

Some wanton Israelite, when he had eaten and was full, might give free scope and indulgence to this talent. As arguments and sober reasoning fail'd, he might turn the edge of his wit against types and symbols, and treat all the mysteries of his religion, and every thing that could be said on so serious a subject, with raillery and mirth : he might give vent to a world of pleasantry upon many sacred passages of his law : he might banter the golden calf, or the brazen serpent, with great courage,—and confound himself in the distinctions of clean and unclean beasts, by the desperate sallies of his wit against them.

He could but possibly take one step farther : when the land which flowed with milk and honey,

had quite worn out the impressions of his yoke, and blessings began to multiply upon his hands, he might draw this curious conclusion :—That there was no being who was the author and bestower of them,—but that it was their own arm, and the mightiness of Israelitish strength, which had put them, and kept them, in possession of so much happiness.—

O Moses,—How would thy meek and patient spirit have been put to the torture by such a return ! If a propensity towards superstition in the Israelites did once betray thee into such an excess of anger, that thou threwest the two tables out of thy hands, which God had wrote, and carelessly hazardedst the whole treasure of the world,—with what indignation and honest anguish wouldst thou have heard the scoffings of those who denied the hand which brought them forth, and said,—Who is God, that we should obey his voice ?—with what force and vivacity wouldst thou have reproached them with the history of their own nation !—that if too free an enjoyment of God's blessings had made them forget to look backwards,—it was necessary to remind them, that their forefathers were Pharaoh's bondsmen in Egypt, without prospect of deliverance : that the chains of their captivity had been fixed and rivetted by a succession of four hundred and thirty years, without the interruption of one struggle for their liberty : that after the expiration of that hopeless period, when no natural means favoured the event, they were snatched, almost against their own wills, out of the hands of their oppressors, and led through an ocean of dangers, to the possession of a land of plenty : that this change in their affairs, was not the produce of chance or fortune,—

nor was it projected or executed by any achievement or plan of human device, which might soon again be defeated by superior strength or policy from without, or from force of accidents from within; from change of circumstances, humours, and passions of men, all which generally had a sway in the rise and fall of kingdoms,—but that all was brought about by the power and goodness of God, who saw and pitied the afflictions of a distressed people, and, by a chain of great and mighty deliverances, set them free from the yoke of oppression.

That since that miraculous escape, a series of successes not to be accounted for by second causes and the natural course of events, had demonstrated not only God's providence in general, but his particular providence and attachment to them;—that nations greater and mightier than they, were driven out before them, and their lands given to them for an everlasting possession.—

This was what they should teach their children, and their children's children after them.—Happy generations, for whom so joyful a lesson was prepared! happy indeed! had ye at all times known to have made the use of it which Moses continually exhorted,—" of drawing nigh unto God with all " your hearts, who had been so nigh unto you."

And here let us drop the argument as it respects the Jews, and for a moment turn it towards ourselves: the present occasion, and the recollection which is natural upon it, of the many other parts of this complicated blessing vouchsafed to us, since we became a nation, making it hard to desist from such an application.

I begin with the first in order of time, as well as

the greatest of national deliverances,—our deliverance from darkness and idolatry, by the conveyance of the light which christianitybrought with it into Britain, so early as in the lifetime of the apostles themselves, or at furthest, not many years after their death.

Though this might seem a blessing conveyed and offered to us in common with other parts of the world, yet when you reflect upon this as a remote corner of the earth in respect of Judea,—its situation and inaccessibleness as an island,—the little that was then known of navigation,—or carried on of commerce,—the large tract of land which to this day remains unhallowed with the name of Christ, and almost in the neighbourhood of where the first glad tidings of him were sounded,—one cannot but adore the goodness of God, and remark a more particular providence in its conveyance and establishment here, than amongst other nations upon the continent,—where, though the oppositions from error and prejudice were equal, it had not these natural impediments to encounter.

Historians and statesmen, who generally search every where for the causes of events but in the pleasure of Him who disposes of them, may make different reflections upon this. They may consider it as a matter incidental, brought to pass by the fortuitous ambition, success, and settlement of the Romans here; it appearing that in Claudius's reign, when christianity began to get footing in Rome, near eighty thousand of that city and people were fixed in this island: as this made a free communication betwixt the two places, the way for the gospel was in course open, and its transition from the one to the other,

natural and easy to be accounted for,—and yet nevertheless, providential. God often suffers us to pursue the devices of our hearts, whilst he turns the course of them, like the rivers of waters, to bountiful purposes. Thus, he might make that pursuit of glory inherent in the Romans, the engine to advance his own, and establish it here: he might make the wickedness of the earth to work his own righteousness, by suffering them to wander a while beyond their proper bounds, till his purposes were fulfilled, and "then put his hook into their nostrils," and lead those wild beasts of prey back again into their own land.

Next to this blessing of the light of the Gospel, we must not forget that by which it was preserved from the danger of being totally smothered and extinguished, by that vast swarm of barbarous nations which came down upon us from the north, and shook the whole world, like a tempest; changing names and customs, and language and government, and almost the very face of nature, wherever they fixed. That our religion should be preserved at all, when every thing else seemed to perish which was capable of change;—or, that it should not be hurt under that mighty weight of ruins, beyond the recovery of its former beauty and strength,—the whole can be ascribed to no cause so likely as this, That the same power of God which sent it forth, was present to support it,—when the whole frame of other things gave way.

Next in degree to this mercy of preserving Christianity from an utter extinction,—we must reckon that of being enabled to preserve and free it from corruptions, which the rust of time,—the abuses of

men, and the natural tendency of all things to degeneracy which are trusted to them, had from time to time introduced into it.

Since the day in which this reformation was begun, by how many strange and critical turns has it been perfected and handed down, if not entirely "without spot or wrinkle,"—at least, without great blotches or marks of anility!—

Even the blow which was suffered to fall upon it shortly after, in that period where our history looks so unlike herself (stain'd, Mary, by thee, and disfigured by blood)—can one reflect upon it, without adoring the providence of God, which so speedily snatched the sword of persecution out of her hand,—making her reign as short as it was merciless!

If God then made us, as he did the Israelites, suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock,—how much more signal was his mercy in giving them to us without money, without price, in those good days which followed, when a long and a wise reign was as necessary to build up our church, as a short one was before, to save it from ruins!——The blessing was necessary,—and it was granted:—

God having multiplied the years of that renowned princess to an uncommon number, giving her time, as well as a heart, to fix a wavering persecuted people, and settle them upon such a foundation as must make them happy:—the touchstone by which they are to be tried whom God has entrusted with the care of kingdoms.

Blessed be thy glorious name forever and ever, in making that test so much easier for the British than other princes of this earth; whose subjects,

whatever other changes they have felt, had seldom happened upon that of changing their misery ; and, it is to be feared, are never likely, so long as they are kept so strongly bound in chains of darkness,—and chains of power.

From both these kinds of evils, which are almost naturally connected together, how providential was our escape in the succeeding reign, when all the choice blood was bespoke, and preparations made, to offer it up at one sacrifice !

I would not intermix the horrors of that black projected festival with the glories of this ; or name the sorrows of the next reign, which ended in the subversion of our constitution, was it not necessary to pursue the thread of our deliverances through those times, and remark how nigh God's providence was to us in them both,—by protecting us from the one, in as signal a manner as he restored us from the other.

Indeed, the latter of them might have been a joyless matter of remembrance to us at this day, had it not been confirmed a blessing by a succeeding escape, which sealed and conveyed it safe down to us : whether it was to correct an undue sense of former blessings,—or to teach us to reflect upon the number and value of them, by threatening us with the deprivation of them,—we were suffered, however, to aproach the edge of a precipice, where, if God had not raised up a deliverer to lead us back,—all had been lost :—the arts of jesuitry had decoyed us forwards ; or, if that had failed, we had been push'd down by open force,—and our destruction had been inevitable.

The good consequences of that deliverance are such, that it seemed as if God had suffered our waters, like those of Bethesda, to be troubled, to make them afterwards more healing to us; since to the account of that day's blessing, we charge the enjoyment of every thing since worth a freeman's living for;—the revival of our liberty, our religion, the just rights of our kings,—and the just rights of our people; and along with all, that happy provision for their continuance, for which we are returning thanks to God this day.

Let us do it, I beseech you, in the way which becomes wise men, by pursuing the intentions of his blessings, and making a better use of them than our forefathers, who sometimes seem'd to grow weary of their own happiness:—let us rather thank God for the good land which he has given us; and when we begin to prosper in it, and have built goodly houses, and dwelt therein,—and when our silver and our gold is multiplied, and all that we have is multiplied, let the instances of our virtue and benevolence be multiplied with them, that the great and mighty God, who is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works, may, in the last day of accounting with us, judge us worthy of the mercies we have received.

In vain are days set apart to celebrate successful occurrences, unless they influence a nation's morals:—a sinful people can never be grateful to God,—nor can they, properly speaking, be loyal to their prince;—they cannot be grateful to the one, because they live not under a sense of his mercies;—nor can they be loyal to the other, because they disengage the providence of God from taking his part,—

and then giving a heart to his adversaries to be intractable.—

And therefore, what was said by some one, That every sin was a treason against the soul, may be applied here,—That every wicked man is a traitor to his king and his country. And, whatever statesmen may write of the causes of the rise and fall of nations;—for the contrary reasons, a good man will ever be found to be the best patriot and the best subject: and though an individual may say, What can my righteousness profit a nation of men? it may be answered, That if it should fail of a blessing here,—it will have one advantage at least, which is this,—

It will save thy own soul;—which may God grant. Amen.

SERMON XXII.

THE HISTORY OF JACOB CONSIDERED.

GENESIS XLVI. 9.

And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, the days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the day of the years of my life been.—

THERE is not a man in history whom I pity more than the man who made this reply:—not because his days were short,—but that they were long enough to have crowded into them so much evil as we find.

Of all the patriarchs, he was the most unhappy: for, 'bating the seven years he served Laban for Rachel, "which seemed to him but a few days, for "the love he had to her,"—strike those out of the number,—all his other days were sorrow; and that not from his faults, but from the ambition, the violences, and evil passions of others. A large portion of what man is born to, comes, you'll say, from the same quarter:—'tis true; but still, in some men's lives, there seems a contexture of misery:—one evil so rises out of another, and the whole plan and execution of the piece has so very melancholy an air, that a good-natured man shall not be able to look upon it but with tears on his cheeks.

I pity this patriarch still the more, because, from his first setting out in life, he had been led into an expectation of such different scenes: he was told by

Isaac, his father, that " God should bless him with " the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, " and with plenty of corn and wine ;—that people " were to serve him, and nations to bow down to " him ;—that he should be lord over his brethren ; " —that blessed was every one that blessed him, and " cursed was every one who cursed him."

The simplicity of youth takes promises of happiness in the fullest latitude ;—and as these were moreover confirmed to him by the God of his fathers, on his way to Padan-aran,—it would leave no distrust of their accomplishments upon his mind ;—every fair and flattering object before him, which wore the face of joy, he would regard as a portion of his blessing ;—he would pursue it ;—he would grasp a shadow.

This, by the way, makes it necessary to suppose, that the blessings which were conveyed, had a view to blessings not altogether such as a carnal mind would expect ; but that they were in a great measure spiritual, and such as the prophetick soul of Isaac had principally before him, in the comprehensive idea of their future and happy establishment, when they were no longer to be strangers and pilgrims upon earth : for in fact, in the strict and literal sense of his father's grant,—Jacob enjoyed it not ; and was so far from being a happy man, that, in the most interesting passages of his life, he met with nothing but disappointments and grievous afflictions.

Let us accompany him from the first treacherous hour of a mother's ambition ; in consequence of which, he is driven forth from his country and the protection of his house, to seek protection and establishment in the house of Laban his kinsman.

In what manner this answered his expectations, we find from his own pathetick remonstrance to Laban, when he had pursued him seven days journey, and overtook him on Mount Gilead.—I see him in the door of the tent, with the calm courage which innocence gives the oppressed, thus remonstrating to his father-in-law upon the cruelty of his treatment:—

"These twenty years that I have been thee,—"thy ewes have not cast their young; and the rams "of thy flock have I not eaten. That which was "torn of beasts I brought not unto thee; I bare the "loss of it;—what was stolen by day, or stolen by "night, of my hands didst thou require it. Thus I "was: in the day the drought consumed me, and "the frost by night; and my sleep departed from "my eyes. Thus have I been twenty years in thy "house:—I served thee fourteen years for thy two "daughters, and six years for thy cattle; and thou "hast changed my wages ten times."

Scarce had he recovered from these evils, when the ill conduct and vices of his children wound his soul to death.—Reuben proves incestuous;—Judah adulterous;—his daughter Dinah is dishonoured;—Simeon and Levi dishonour themselves by treachery;—two of his grandchildren are stricken with sudden death;—Rachel, his beloved wife, perishes, and in circumstances which imbitter'd his loss;—his son Joseph, a most promising youth, is torn from him by the envy of his brethren;—and, to close all, himself driven by famine, in his old age, to die amongst the Egyptians;—a people who held it an abomination to eat bread with him. Unhappy patriarch! well might he say, 'That few and evil had

' been his days :' the answer, indeed, was extended beyond the monarch's inquiry, which was simply his age :—but how could he look back upon the days of his pilgrimage, without thinking of the sorrows which those days had brought along with them? all that was more in the answer than in the demand, was the overflowings of a heart ready to bleed afresh at the recollection of what had befallen.

Unwillingly does the mind digest the evils prepared for it by others ;—for those we prepare ourselves,—we eat but the fruit which we have planted and watered :—a shattered fortune,—a shattered frame, so we have but the satisfaction of shattering them ourselves, pass natural enough into the habit, and by the ease with which they are both done, they save the spectator a world of pity : but for those like Jacob's, brought upon him by the hands from which he looked for all his comforts,—the avarice of a parent,—the unkindness of a relation,—the ingratitude of a child,—they are evils which leave a scar :—besides, as they hang over the heads of all, and therefore may fall upon any,—every looker-on has an interest in the tragedy ;—but then we are apt to interest ourselves no otherwise than merely as the incidents themselves strike our passions, without carrying the lesson further.—In a word,—we realize nothing :—we sigh,—we wipe away the tear,—and there ends the story of misery, and the moral with it.

Let us try to do better with this. To begin with the bad bias which gave the whole turn to the patriarch's life,—parental partiality,—or parental injustice,—it matters not by what title it stands distinguished,—'tis that by which Rebekah planted a

dagger in Esau's breast,—and an eternal terror with it in her own, lest she should live to be deprived of them both in one day :—and trust me, dear christians, wherever that equal balance of kindness and love, which children look up to you for as their natural right, is no longer maintained, there will daggers ever be planted ; " the son shall [*literally*] be " set at variance against his father, and the daugh- " ter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law " against her mother-in-law ;—and a man's foes " shall be they of his own household."

It was an excellent ordinance, as well of domestick policy as of equity, which Moses gave upon this head, in the 21st of Deuteronomy.

" If a man have two wives, one beloved and one " hated, and they have born him children, both the " beloved and the hated ; and if the first-born son " be hers that was hated, then it shall be, when he " maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, " that he may not make the son of the beloved first- " born, before the son of the hated which is indeed " the first-born ;—but he shall acknowledge the son " of the hated for first-born, by giving him a double " portion of all that he hath." The evil was well fenced against ;—for 'tis one of those which steals in upon the heart with the affections, and courts the parent under so sweet a form, that thousands have been betrayed by the very virtues which should have preserved them. Nature tells the parent, there can be no error on the side of affection ;—but we forget, when nature pleads for one, she pleads for every child alike ;—and, why is not her voice to be heard ? Solomon says, " Oppression will make a wise man " mad."—What will it do then to a tender and ingen-

uous heart which feels itself neglected,—too full of reverence for the author of its wrongs to complain ?—See, it sits down in silence, robbed by discouragements of all its natural powers to please,—born to see others loaded with caresses ;—in some uncheery corner it nourishes its discontent,—and with a weight upon its spirits, which its little stock of fortitude is not able to withstand,—it droops, and pines away.—Sad victim of caprice !

We are unavoidably led here into a reflection upon Jacob's conduct in regard to his son Joseph, which no way corresponded with the lesson of wisdom which the miseries of his own family might have taught him,—surely his eyes had seen sorrow sufficient on that score, to have taken warning ; and yet we find, that he fell into the same snare of partiality to that child in his old age, which his mother Rebekah had shewn to him in hers ;—" for Israel " loved Joseph more than all his children, because " he was the son of his old age ; and he made him " a coat of many colours."—O Israel ! where was that prophetick spirit which darted itself into future times, and told each tribe what was to be its fate ?—Where was it fled, that it could not aid thee to look so little a way forwards, as to behold " this coat of many colours" stained with blood ? Why were the tender emotions of a parent's anguish hid from thy eyes ?—and, why is every thing ?—but that it pleases Heaven to give us no more light in our way than will leave virtue in possession of its recompense.—

—Grant me, gracious God, to go cheerfully on the road which thou hast marked out !—I wish it neither more wide nor more smooth :—continue the

light of this dim taper thou hast put into my hands? —I will kneel upon the ground seven times a day to seek the best track I can with it;—and having done that, I will trust myself and the issue of my journey to thee, who art the Fountain of joy,—and will sing songs of comfort as I go along!

Let us proceed to the second great occurrence in the patriarch's life,—The imposition of a wife upon him, which he neither bargain'd for nor loved.—"And it came to pass in the morning, behold it was "Leah! And he said unto Laban, What is this that "thou hast done unto me? Did I not serve thee for "Rachel? Wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?"

This, indeed, is out of the system of all conjugal impositions now,—but the moral of it is still good: and the abuse, with the same complaint of Jacob's upon it, will ever be repeated, so long as art and artifice are so busy as they are in these affairs.

Listen, I pray you, to the stories of the disappointed in marriage!—collect all their complaints:—hear their mutual reproaches: Upon what fatal hinge do the greatest part of them turn?—'They 'were mistaken in the person.'—Some disguise, either of body or mind, is seen through in the first domestick scuffle;—some fair ornament,—perhaps the very one that won the heart;—"the ornament "of a meek and quiet spirit," falls off.—"It is not "the Rachel for whom I have served:—Why hast "thou then beguiled me!"

Be open,—be honest:—give yourself for what you are; conceal nothing,—varnish nothing;—and if these fair weapons will not do,—better not conquer at all than conquer for a day.—When the night is passed, 'twill ever be the same story:—"And it "came to pass, behold it was Leah!"

If the heart beguiles itself in its choice, and imagination will give excellencies which are not the portion of flesh and blood,—when the dream is over, and we awake in the morning, it matters little whether 'tis Rachel or Leah;—be the object what it will, as it must be on the earthly side, at least, of perfection,—it will fall short of the work of fancy, whose existence is in the clouds.

In such cases of deception, let no man exclaim as Jacob does in his,—"What is it thou hast done unto "me?"—for 'tis his own doings; and he is nothing to lay his fault on but the heat and poetick indiscretion of his own passions.

I know not whether 'tis of any use to take notice of this singularity in the patriarch's life, in regard to the wrong he received from Laban, which was the very wrong he had done before to his father Isaac, when the infirmities of old age had disabled him from distinguishing one child from another:—"Art "thou my very son Esau? And he said, I am." 'Tis doubtful whether Leah's veracity was put to the same test; but both suffered from a similitude of stratagem; and 'tis hard to say, whether the anguish, from cross'd love, in the breast of one brother, might not be as sore a punishment as the disquietudes of cross'd ambition and revenge in the breast of the other.

I do not see which way the honour of Providence is concerned in repaying us exactly in our own coin;—or, why a man should fall into that very pit (and no other) which he has "graven and digged for another man." Time and chance may bring such incidents about; and there wants nothing, but that Jacob should have been a bad man to have made this a common-place text for such a doctrine.

It is enough for us, that the best way to escape evil is, in general, not to commit it ourselves ;—and that whenever the passions of mankind will order it otherwise, to rob those, at least, " who love judgment," of the triumph of finding it out,—' That ' our travail has returned upon our heads, and our ' violent dealings upon our own pates.'

I cannot conclude this discourse, without returning first to the part with which it set out ;—the patriarch's account to the king of Egypt of the shortness and misery of his days.—Give me leave to bring this home to us, by a single reflection upon each.

There is something strange in it, that life should appear so short *in the gross*,—and yet so long *in the detail*. Misery may make it so, you'll say,—but we will exclude it ;—and still you'll find, though we all complain of the shortness of life, what numbers there are who seem quite overstocked with the days and hours of it, and are continually sending out into the highways and streets of the city, to compel guests to come in, and take it off their hands : to do this with ingenuity and forecast, is not one of the least arts and businesses of life itself; and they who cannot succeed in it, carry as many marks of distress about them as bankruptcy herself could wear. Be as careless as we may, we shall not always have the power ;—nor shall we always be in a temper to let the account run thus. When the blood is cool'd, and the spirits, which have hurried us on through half our days, before we have numbered one of them, are beginning to retire,—then wisdom will press a moment to be heard ;—afflictions, or a bed of sickness will find their hours of persuasion ;—and, should

they fail, there is something yet behind :—Old age will overtake us at the last, and with its trembling hand hold up the glass to us as it did to the patriarch.

—Dear inconsiderate christians, wait not, I beseech you, till then ;—take a view of your life now: —look back,—behold this fair space capable of such heavenly improvements,—all scrawl'd over and defaced with——I want words to say with what,—for I think only of the reflections with which you are to support yourselves in the decline of a life so miserably cast away,—should it happen, as it often does, that ye have stood idle unto the eleventh hour, and have all the work of the day to perform when night comes on, and no one can work.

2dly. As to the evil of the days of the years of our pilgrimage,—speculation and fact appear at variance again.—We agree with the patriarch, that the life of man is miserable ; and yet the world looks happy enough,—and every thing tolerably at its ease. It must be noted indeed, that the patriarch, in this account, speaks merely his present feelings ; and seems rather to be giving a history of his sufferings than a system of them, in contradiction to that of the God of Love. Look upon the world he has given us !—observe the riches and plenty which flows in every channel, not only to satisfy the desires of the temperate,—but of the fanciful and wanton !—every place is almost a paradise, planted when nature was in her gayest humour !

—Every thing has two views. Jacob, and Job, and Solomon, gave one section of the globe ;—and this representation another.—Truth lieth betwixt,—or rather, good and evil are mixed up together ; which of the two preponderates, is beyond our en-

quiry ;—but, I trust,—it is the good.—First, as it renders the Creator of the world more dear and venerable to us ;—and, secondly, Because I will not suppose that a work intended to exalt his glory, should stand in want of apologies.

Whatever is the proportion of misery in this world, it is certain, that it can be no duty of religion to increase the complaint—or to affect the praise which the Jesuits' college of Granada gave their Sanchez :—That though he lived where there was a very sweet garden, yet was never seen to touch a flower ; and that he would rather die than eat salt or pepper, or aught that might give a relish to his meat.

I pity the men, whose natural pleasures are burdens, and who fly from joy (as these splenetick and morose souls do) as if it was really an evil in itself.

If there is an evil in this world, 'tis sorrow and heaviness of heart.—The loss of goods,—of health, —of coronets and mitres, are only evil as they occasion sorrow ;—take that out,—the rest is fancy, and dwelleth only in the head of man.

Poor unfortunate creature that he is ! as if the causes of anguish in the heart were not enow,—but he must fill up the measure with those of caprice ; and not only walk in a vain shadow,—but disquiet himself in vain too !

We are a restless set of beings ; and as we are likely to continue so to the end of the world,—the best we can do in it is, to make the same use of this part of our character which wise men do of other bad propensities ;—when they find they cannot conquer them,—they endeavour, at least, to divert them into good channels.

If, therefore, we must, be a solicitous race of self-tormenters,—let us drop the common objects which make us so,—and, for God's sake, be solicitous only to live well!

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